

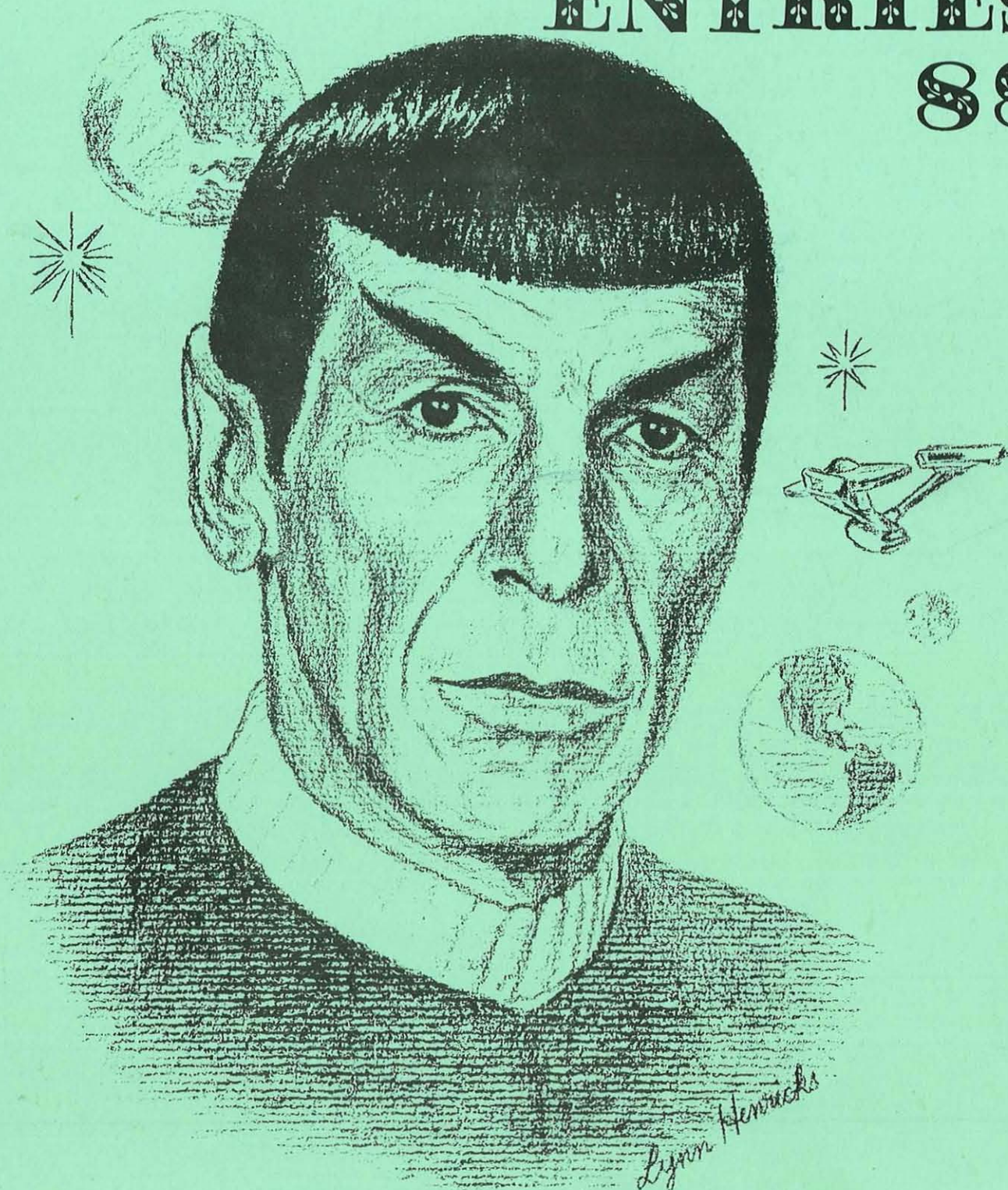
ENTERPRISE

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LOG

ENTRIES

88



*a
Star Trek
fanzine*

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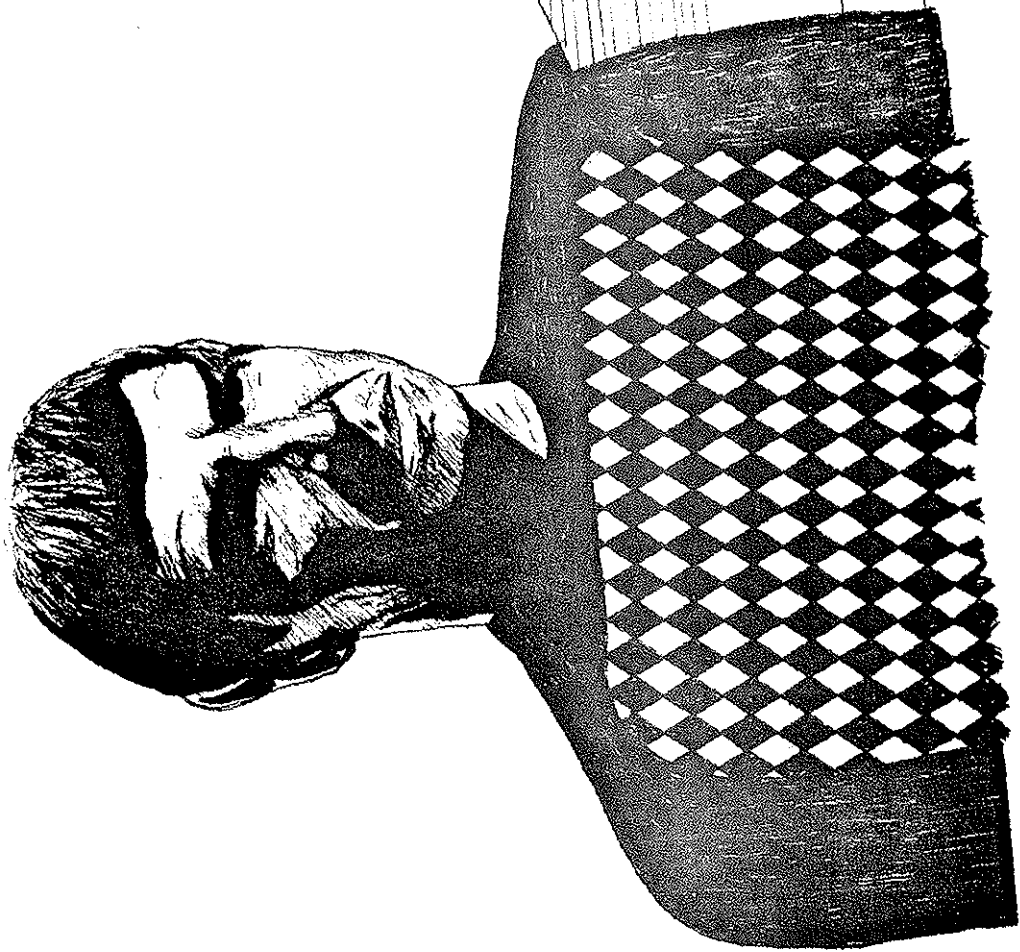
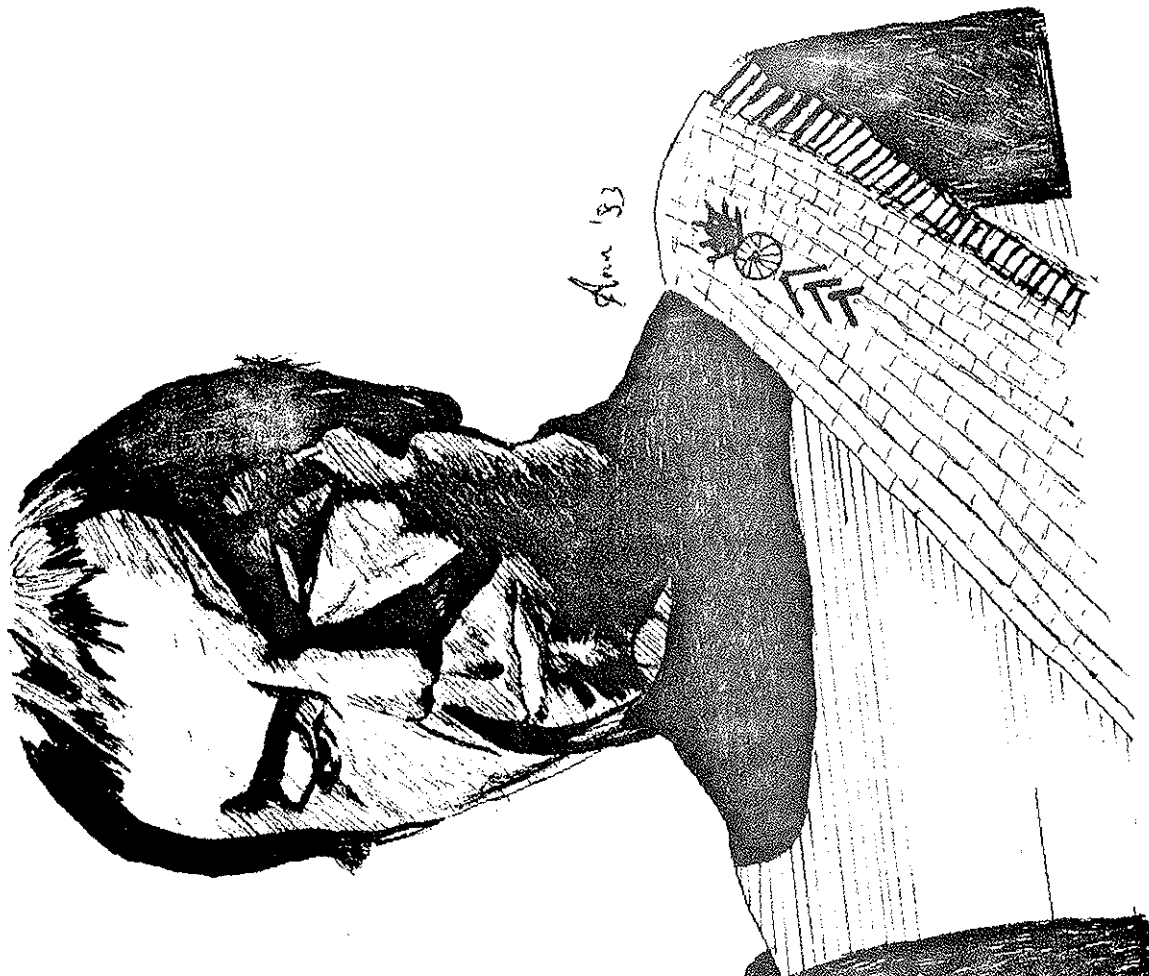
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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona



ONE THAT GOT AWAY

by

Krysia Baczala

As a young and very junior officer on the Enterprise, I don't get much of an opportunity to work with Captain Kirk. Usually I'm only in the same place as him during parades, general inspections and that sort of thing. So you can imagine my surprise and delight when I found out that I was going to have him virtually all to myself for almost six days.

It was Lt Uhura who first told me about it. She's my immediate superior, the officer in charge of my little section, although we are all, of course, ultimately answerable to the Captain. Uhura, who is in charge of all matters relating to Communications, acts as head of my sub-department, which is Records.

It's not a large department; there's only me and two ensigns. I'm sure there are some of the crew of the Enterprise who don't even know where my cubby-hole of an office is, as it's tucked away in the bowels of the ship. Anyway, our job is to keep records of everything that happens. It can be anything from the Captain's log entries to noting how many uniform shirts the Quartermaster ordered this trip, or anything in between. And believe me, on a Starship that's a lot!

We send off all that we record to Starfleet Headquarters. Sometimes I'm awestruck by the thought of the Starfleet Records Department back on Earth, which swallows up all the information we send. And not only what we send, but all the other Starships too, and the scoutships and communications vessels and so on. All the information is analysed, cross-referenced and then stored in case anyone ever needs it. Even using computer banks, the Records Department is already the size of a whole city.

If you think about it, it's not surprising really. Consider all the course of Human history, and all the histories of all the planets we have ever encountered, and all the knowledge, music, literature and philosophy of all the races, and it isn't hard to see that some day we'll need a whole planet as a storehouse.

Now in my job, in the light of all that information it would be easy to let yourself begin to think that it doesn't really matter if you don't record the exact number of shirts or whatever, as nobody will ever look at it anyway. But the fact is that I do believe it matters, and it's important. Keeping records, making them accurate, and arranging them for easy access and retrieval is my life's passion. Ever since I was a little girl I made it my business to learn everything I could about recording. I was always fascinated by the attempts of sentient species to make a permanent record of their thoughts and deeds, whether it be Egyptian hieroglyphics, photography, or the spoken word. I learned all about hand notation, Betazoid hyper-writing, and computerised records. A visit to the Rosetta stone in London, England, on Earth was one of my biggest teenage thrills.

I've taken pleasure and joy in my work, and I can say truly and with no undue arrogance on my part that I am very good at my job. I don't suppose I'd be in charge of keeping records on a Starship if I wasn't.

I'm side-tracking!

Uhura came to see me in the middle of a busy day and told me that the Captain needed me to accompany him planetside for up to six days, and that we'd be leaving in about four hours. She suggested that I pack my gear, and as there was no time to waste she'd brief me as we went to my quarters. She told me that when I had a fuller understanding of what was required I would return to Records and collect the tools of my trade. We got to my cabin in double-quick time, and I began to throw together a bedroll and basic survival equipment. As I packed I listened to what she had to say.

Apparently what had happened was this. A distress call had been received from Outpost 127, where a scientific colony of Federation personnel was based. It explained that there had been some sort of explosion, and several of the staff had been contaminated with radiation. Although medics were available, there was an urgent need for top-class facilities if the injured people were to survive.

The Enterprise had been swiftly crossing a relatively empty section of space on its way to the rescue. As it sped through the void, still about three and a half days away from the outpost, scanners had registered a small ship travelling in the same direction as us but far ahead. Because we were going much faster we would have overtaken it in a matter of hours.

Mr Spock had been particularly interested as sensors had indicated that it was of a design not known to the Federation. We had been too distant at that point to take any life readings. A watch was kept. As we had come closer Mr Spock had reported that the ship was definitely of a type unknown, and was crewed by eight life forms which were humanoid but not Human. There was no match with any previously encountered race.

We had been travelling close to the limits of charted space at the time, and a possible conclusion was that the travellers were from a planet never before contacted by the Federation. Captain Kirk had begun to get excited.

Uhura told me that at about that time the small ship's sensors must have detected the giant Starship following and gaining on it, because it had suddenly darted off and hidden behind the nearest heavenly body, so to speak. Despite efforts to hail the craft no reply had been received. The inference was that they were scared.

The Captain had discussed with Mr Spock the need for speed to reach Outpost 127 versus the missed opportunity to contact another potential member for the Federation. On being assured that a delay of few hours would not be crucial, he had ordered the Enterprise to halt and then cautiously approach the smaller vessel. Constantly broadcasting friendship messages, he had finally been rewarded with a reply.

To cut a long story short, these turned out to be people of a race who called themselves Xen, from the planet Xen'ir. They had limited spaceflight, had been visited by offworlders in the past, and had then decided to go out and see what they could find for themselves. They had not previously contacted anything of the magnitude of the Federation and its giant Starship.

Captain Kirk had decided to go for a First Contact.

Preliminary exchanges of information indicated a civilisation ripe for membership, and a chance meeting like this should not be allowed to pass by. Kirk explained to the Xen commander (a man whose name we could not pronounce, so we simply resorted to calling him 'Commander') that we were on a mercy mission, that our ship had to go on but that the Enterprise would be willing to leave a small team on the nearest suitable planet to talk and

exchange information. In six days the Enterprise would return from the round trip to Outpost 127, and we could go on our separate ways, carrying information about each other to our appropriate superiors.

The team of eight from each crew which Captain Kirk proposed didn't meet with Commander's approval. He didn't want to risk all his people away from his small ship at once, but did want to match numbers exactly with personnel from the Enterprise, not wishing to be outnumbered, we guessed. He was still clearly suspicious of the unknown race, and our superior firepower. He proposed going down himself, accompanied by just one other crewmember, possibly to be joined by others later if all seemed well. He requested that Captain Kirk join him on the surface, and that he bring just one other person. Commander indicated that he would bring a female Records Officer, to keep an account of all that was said at this important first meeting. Kirk agreed that he would do the same.

Spock had checked the physical requirements of the Xen, and found them not dissimilar to ours. A suitable planet, listed as having no sentient inhabitants, was only six hours away and roughly on our path of travel. Agreement was made to meet there. That was two hours ago, and now we were four hours away from the planet, and I had that much time to get organised.

The last two hours had been full of discussion and preparation at senior levels. By the time Uhura finished briefing me I had not got a great deal of time left to get ready and report to the transporter room. I had a thorough shower, and put my hair up in a tight style so that it wouldn't get messy on the unknown planet. Most exploration is insulated behind the walls of a ship. This would be the real thing.

I agonised over whether to wear dress uniform (after all, it was a First Contact, and protocol was important) or whether to consider instead the need for comfort for survival in unknown conditions. No-one had given specific orders in that respect. I opted for the latter, and selected a warm but light jumpsuit, which had numerous pockets. I packed them with a few personal things like chocolate (I love the stuff) and handkerchiefs (I'm allergic to just about any pollen I've ever encountered on any planet, and for all I knew we could be beaming down to a jungle in the middle of summer.) I made sure that I looked really smart. I didn't want the Captain to find any fault. I strapped on my equipment belt, clipped on my communicator, and taking a last look around the cabin I picked up my small holdall and went to visit Security. Any crew going planetside regularly draws phasers, so I signed one out, clipped it alongside my communicator, and after dashing to get a meal I went back to Records.

Once there I picked up my recording case. This is rather like a briefcase, but when you open it it's an absolute marvel of computerised circuits, electronic wizardry and state of the art tricorder and universal translator technology. It's not standard Starfleet issue, although components of it are. My parents had given it to me when I was assigned to the Enterprise. It was very expensive. In the culture from which I spring a girl gets a dowry when she marries. In my parents' social class this may be a house or other dwelling for the couple. When it became clear that I didn't need a house when I 'married' Starfleet, I guess they reckoned I might as well have a dowry anyway, and they gave me my case. I treasure it.

If it was going to be my job to record everything that was said on this First Contact I was going to make sure I did the best job anyone could. I wasn't going to miss one grunt, one gesture, one word. Not on this mission.

When the time came I was all packed and ready to go. The door of the transporter room swished open and in came Captain Kirk, followed by Mr Spock and Dr McCoy. They stopped just inside and the Captain looked me up and down, then glanced at my gear, which was in a

small pile at my feet. He too was wearing standard rather than dress uniform. I don't think he even realised he was inspecting me; I think he did it automatically, scanning constantly to see that everything on his Starship was as it should be. He didn't comment on my appearance or gear, and I took that to mean he hadn't registered any fault. Approval by lack of disapproval. I was glad I'd made the effort.

He simply inclined his head towards me. "Hussen," he said.

"Sir." I snapped to attention.

He smiled. "Let's get going." He headed for the transporter platform.

I was surprised when Mr Spock picked up my gear for me and swung it effortlessly onto the transporter pad. He placed it next to a larger pile which I assumed was Kirk's personal gear and token gifts for the Xen.

"Thank you," I said, but he didn't reply.

"Take it easy, Jim," Dr McCoy said with a smile. "We'll be back for you in six days."

Captain Kirk simply held up his hand as if to say, "Bye". "You have the con," he said to Mr Spock, then simply, "Mr. Kyle," and the transporter shimmer took us.

We materialised on the edge of a plain which rippled with a plant that on this planet passed for grass. To the other side of us the ground sloped up, and we could see that the land became rougher as it rose to foothills strewn with boulders, and finally to high hills, but not to mountains. The tops were shrouded in mist. There was no precipitation at present, but looking at the clouds that scudded on a blustery wind, rain seemed imminent. Low scrub and woodland was beginning to colonise the lower slopes and the edges of the plain.

The Captain looked around. "Spock chose carefully," he approved. "There should be water just up ahead in the next valley."

And indeed there was. We carried our packs just a short distance and found an ideal spot to make a base. There was a flat piece of land a short distance above a small fast-flowing river. We didn't want to be too close to the watercourse in case it should flood if it rained. There was a small rock face which seemed to have caves along it, perhaps excavated by water when the river had once been higher. They looked as if they might be useful if we needed shelter.

The Captain suggested we pile our equipment in one place and then wait for our visitors. I unpacked a few things, activated the recorder, and tied in the universal translator. While we waited for the agreed meeting hour we had the time to do a swift preliminary survey. With tricorders going at full speed we checked out the air, soil and water for poisonous elements, and even had time to test a few of the local plants for toxicity. Very little on this planet was edible; perhaps one or two of the tubers, but mainly only the fruit of a few of the small trees and shrubs we had seen growing, gave any hope at all of fresh supplies.

We didn't have very long to wait. We heard the hum of a transporter, similar to ours, just across the stream on the other side of the valley, and saw four figures materialise.

Four!

Captain Kirk and I exchanged glances. Was this treachery already, when agreements had clearly stated two? The Captain's hand went to his phaser. So did mine.

"Gently," he said to me, and turned to face the advancing Xen.

I took up a position just behind and to the side of my Captain's right shoulder. I was not Security, but if it came to a fire fight, I was going to do everything I could to protect him.

The Xen commander was an extremely handsome man. Tall and dark, his skin olive-coloured like my own, he appeared strong and confident. The female at his side projected an aura of stillness. She had an economy of movement about her that promised great agility if required. We sized each other up across the decreasing distance. Behind them came two men who could have been twins. Shorter than the Commander, they stared straight ahead as they strode towards us.

Captain Kirk took a step forward and we faced one another across the narrow channel water. "Greetings, Commander of the Xen," he said formally. "On behalf of the United Federation of Planets, may I express our delight at contacting a new people. We hope that our chance meeting will lead to much progress and friendship between our races."

The Xen male made a gesture with his left hand which amounted to holding it out palm up then palm down three times alternately. I made a mental note to ask him the exact meaning later, but under the circumstances I assumed (hoped!) that it was a gesture of greeting and peace. In a low and complex language, more burr and slur than clipped consonants, he replied.

The translator told us, "We Xen are intrigued by your presence and your claim to represent so many worlds. We share your hopes of friendship. If what you say is true, there is much we can learn from you."

Preliminary courtesies having been exchanged, I wondered what came next.

The Captain glanced at me and muttered, "Start as you mean to go on," and then he said aloud, "Commander, we are on the brink of a historic meeting. I must say, therefore, before we begin - and I apologise if I offend the way of the Xen - that our agreement was for two representatives of each craft to meet, and it would seem that you have brought four. Is this how the Xen begin an exercise in trust?"

There was a moment's silence, and I felt the Captain tense, but the Xen Commander's expression seemed to be one of genuine puzzlement. He turned to his companion and they discussed something quickly before he turned back to us.

"Captain," he said, "you need not apologise. You do not insult us. We have kept the agreement. These..." and he indicated the 'twins', "they are..." He hesitated, and the translator faltered for a moment before finally coming up with "droids."

The Commander called them forward, and close up we could see that they were indeed sophisticated androids. The Xen gave some further gestured instructions and the whole group of four made their way over some rocks in the bed of the narrow river to join us on our bank. He indicated that we should examine them more closely if we needed to, but now it was obvious, despite their extremely life-like appearance, that they were simply drone robots of the personal servant type, which we had previously encountered among other races.

Trust having been established and the ice having been broken, so to speak, there began a whole series of gestures of friendship and diplomatic 'courting'. It was clear that the Xen

wanted to know as much about us as we did about them. We sat together and exchanged artefacts. We recorded each other's lifesigns on our respective tricorders, and mostly we just talked and talked.

As night fell we built a small fire not far from where an overhanging rock gave some shelter from the breeze. We exchanged food and drink, and told tales of the Federation. Eventually I remember hardly being able to keep my eyes open. Captain Kirk dismissed me and I went to lie down against the rock wall, wrapped in a blanket. Gradually I dropped off to sleep while I watched the fire die to embers and listened to the drone of the voices of the Xen and the Captain and the universal translator as they talked on, deep into the night.

What woke me, I think, was the dampness. I felt cold and clammy, and part of my brain told me to move, that I shouldn't be cold and clammy, but mostly I experienced a reluctance to come awake. It was like the feeling some people experience when they are coming out of a general anaesthetic. Something was wrong. I realised that I didn't feel well. Much, much too sleepy and woolly, not like waking from a normal sleep at all. I felt drugged.

Drugged!

I struggled and opened my eyes. I was still wrapped in my blanket, still turned close against the rock wall. It was daylight, but very grey with scudding clouds and a penetrating drizzle. That explained the dampness of my blanket and clothes, which had been made wet as the wind blew the moisture under the overhanging rock where I lay. If it hadn't been for that small overhang I would have been soaked. I rolled sluggishly over onto my back and then to my other side, to look over to where last night's fire had been.

Captain Kirk lay tumbled on the ground next to the soggy pile of ashes. Out in the open, without the protection of a blanket or the cliffs, he was wet through. I was concerned for him. I couldn't see if he was injured, but I could see that his clothes were stuck to him, and his hair was plastered to his head. Droplets ran down his face and dripped into the mud.

Of the Xen and their droids there was no sign. And there was no sign of anything else, either. It looked as if they'd taken all of our equipment, including my 'supercase'. I cursed them savagely in my mind.

Movement was an effort. My hand went under the blanket to the belt at my waist. It was still there! I couldn't believe it. I actually had my communicator and phaser. Perhaps they hadn't dared to search in the tangled blanket, where I'd rolled on top of the small items, for fear of the risk of waking me. I pushed the blanket off me and moved a bit further across the ground. Some of the wooliness receded as cold rain splashed into my face. I managed to crawl across to the Captain.

I shook him, but he didn't wake. I felt for his pulse. It was strong, if slow, and he was breathing normally, thank goodness. But his skin was cold to the touch - very cold. I looked up. By the quality of the light it must have been mid to late afternoon; we had been lying there for the night and the best part of a day. I had been slightly covered and sheltered, but the Captain had been right out in the rain, and if I didn't do something quickly he'd end up suffering from exposure, if he wasn't already.

I shook him again, hoping he would wake, but there was still no response, I struggled to my feet. The world wobbled a bit around the edges at first, but steadied quickly enough. I decided that I had to get the Captain under cover and warm as quickly as possible.

The overhanging rock behind us was the best bet. I explored quickly, and it did in fact deepen into quite a good cave. It would have to do. I went back to the Captain and straightened him out onto his back. Hooking my hands under his arms, I heaved. In a succession of about twenty tugs I managed to get him about as far back as we could go. I piled up a heap of small rocks next to us and heated them with the phaser. The glow they gave off would warm our little cave for quite a while.

Uprooting a few bushes and young trees, I put up a quick screen across the entrance. It was poor, but it stopped the worst of the wind and rain. I collected my muddy blanket, tucked one end into a crack in the rock, held the other end to straighten it, and dried it by using the lowest setting on the phaser. The water evaporated in a hiss of steam.

I then did the same thing with Captain Kirk's shirt. It wasn't easy to take it off him, as it was cold and clammy and stuck to him, but I managed it. I debated the rest of his clothes, then decided against it. If they had got him with the same drug they'd used on me, probably administered in the drink they had shared, he'd come round soon enough, though he'd had more of it than I had. If I could raise his temperature that would help, then he could take care of getting the rest of him dry himself. I used his dry shirt to dry him off. I rubbed his skin until it glowed, rubbed his hair dry and then quickly zapped the shirt with the phaser again and put it back on him while it was still warm. Finally, I wrapped him in the blanket.

My own jumpsuit was fast drying out with the warmth of my physical activity and my proximity to the phasered rocks. *Bless all phasers*, I thought as I went down to the stream and looked for something to carry water in. *A hot drink will be good for us*, I thought, but there was nothing suitable to be found at all. Finally I broke some wood, hollowed out a section with the phaser and used that. While there I washed my face and hands, rinsed my mouth and drank plenty. What I took back would be needed by the Captain. On the way back to the cave I searched again in the campfire area, but there was simply nothing left. I hadn't missed anything.

I ducked into our makeshift shelter and got dry again. Shortly afterwards the Captain stirred.

I knelt beside him, but wasn't in too much of a hurry to try and explain to him what had happened, or even ask how he was. If he felt anything like I had done when I came round, he would be too disorientated to take much in at first. I stayed by him, but kept my eyes averted. No-one likes to be stared at when they're at their worst. I suppose I was torn between helping, and wanting to allow him privacy.

At first, he was simply aware. Then he became aware that he was aware. Then I could almost sense him working out where he was and what had happened. After a good few minutes he developed the desire to move. I didn't refrain any longer, but helped him to a sitting position and offered him some water. He drank it thirstily and swilled a mouthful around before turning aside and spitting it out. I knew how he felt.

He sighed deeply and shivered. "I suppose they've gone?" he asked more rhetorically than anything else.

I nodded. "And they've taken everything," I told him.

He shuddered.

"If you'll allow me, sir?" I said by way of asking permission, and I laid a hand on his forehead. He felt hot. "How do you feel?"

He shrugged off the slight fever. "I've been better." He grinned and looked around. "You've done a good job. Can you give me a report?"

So I told him what had happened so far. We took stock of the situation. There wasn't much to take stock of. We had our small cave-like hollow as some sort of shelter, plenty of water, and no food except for my three bars of slightly squished chocolate. Fortunately the season seemed to be what passed for autumn on this planet, so we wouldn't suffer too badly from cold while we waited the five days for the Enterprise to return. Our one remaining communicator clearly didn't have the range to reach the Enterprise, so we had no alternative other than to sit it out and wonder what had happened. And we did wonder.

Had we done anything wrong that would have caused the Xen to leave in such a fashion? Committed some inadvertent social or diplomatic blunder? Were they naturally shy and wary, or perhaps devious thieves in need of modern technology? We simply didn't know. We tried to contact their ship, in case it was still in orbit, but our efforts were only rewarded with static.

Were they really gone, we wondered, or were they still up there watching us? This, more than anything else, gave us an uneasy feeling.

There was nothing we could do except make the best of the situation and stay alert. We had the clothes we stood up in and very little else. I handed over the contents of my pockets, so that we could see how we fared.

Arranged on a flattish rock which jutted out of the ground roughly in the middle of our shelter and which we grew to call table rock, the meagre collection of items looked pitifully inadequate. We had the chocolate, my handkerchiefs, a blanket, phaser and communicator. That was it. But we were better off than we might have been, and we knew it.

The phaser was really the saving grace. It could warm us, dry us, stun or kill, could make fire, and used sparingly would last until the Enterprise returned. We wondered if the Xen had really overlooked it, or if they had left it as a gesture, not exactly of goodwill but perhaps of lack of actual ill will, as an aid to our survival.

The situation was far from desperate. We spent that first afternoon after the Xen had left basically exploring our immediate area, scavenging for food, collecting firewood and improving the screen of shrubbery I had started into a fairly thick lean-to entrance which kept the wind out of our temporary home.

By the time it grew towards evening we were both quite tired and sleepy. This may have been due to the fact that the planet day was longer than the ship's day although we had woken late, but it was probably because of the lingering after-effects of the drug.

Captain Kirk still didn't look well to me, so after a supper of half a bar of chocolate and some phaser-warmed water, I volunteered to take the first watch. He accepted gratefully. I lit a small fire to warm the night chills away and he took the blanket, rolled up in it, and seemed to be asleep almost instantly. I watched him as he lay asleep. He tossed and turned a little, still flushed from a high temperature, but then he seemed to settle down.

Frankly, I was fascinated by the opportunity to study this man at close quarters. My eyes roamed his face, searching, I suppose, for a sign of whatever it was that made him who he was. There was no doubt that a powerful personality slept on the ground beside me. This was a man who could draw others to him like no other I had met. There was something about him that touched his fellows in a way hard to describe. He had the power to command a Starship,

to stretch people to their limits and beyond, to befriend even a Vulcan.

He had an entourage of dedicated followers who loved him, in the greatest sense of that word, who wanted to care for him, who felt privileged to be near him. Such a man could have conquered universes if he had wished to. In his own way, I suppose he already did. I wondered how history would remember him. Would people still talk about him and write about him years from now? I thought perhaps they might.

The middle of the night came. I was glad that my watch was at an end and that I had a chance to get some sleep myself.

The next few days and nights settled into a sort of pattern. I remember them so well. In daylight we roamed the area, ranging further or in different directions, fulfilling a mutual love of exploration. I have said before that most modern exploration is insulated, climate controlled in sleek Starships, at warp speed, with rec rooms and warm beds. This, though, was the real thing! Ants that bit, cold stony ground, sunshine and showers, fresh winds, thorns and earthy scents. I loved it!

As evening drew near we would build a fire and talk and watch the embers glow. He would often lie flat on his back and gaze at the stars for hours. What did he think about when he did that? I wondered.

Twice, at night, we heard a strange noise. It rather resembled that peculiar sound I had heard once during a demonstration using Earth artefacts, an aboriginal bullroarer. Captain Kirk was on his feet instantly, out beyond the fire, phaser in hand, regaining his night sight. Had the Xen returned? Was it some animal our tricorders hadn't registered during our brief original scan?

Several times on our rambles we had seen, keeping their distance, large, sleek, cat-like creatures, similar to Earth lions but striped black and white like a zebra. We had christened them zats. Maybe it was their distant roaring we heard. We never did find out what the night noises were.

I tried to watch the Captain. I think he enjoyed the fresh air and the raw exploring too. After his troubled first night the chill and the fever seemed to leave him, and I caught sight of him once or twice running part of his exploration routes, seemingly for the sheer joy of it. He'd often stop to examine something more closely, to look at a flower, to pick up a pebble, to rinse his hands in a stream. I loved the way he held his hands - you can tell a lot about a man by the way he holds his hands - their expressiveness, sometimes still, sometimes strong. I could have watched him for hours.

We used some sharp stones to scratch out some primitive pictures on a rock face; a diagram of the Enterprise; a man; a woman; a stardate. What would future visitors to this place make of these signs, perhaps millennia from now? What might they say of the ancient remains of our fire?

We spent a good deal of the time just sitting in the sunshine together, enjoying the smell of the earth and the gentle breeze. There were echoes of an atmosphere here, memories of holidays I had taken with my family as a child. Captain Kirk spoke often of a farm in Iowa, his mother, his brother.

We shared some nonsense too, like, "We've never been here before and will never be

here again, together, same time, same place. Even if we come back five minutes later, 'now' won't be 'now' any more." Or, "Out of all the billions and trillions of people in the universe, we are the only ones who can see that beetle crawling on our boots." Or at night, gazing and pointing to the stars, "Been there" and "Been there" and "Been there". Just being silly. Regression to childhood? A necessary relaxation? Who knew? Who cared!

As I said, some of the time we explored alone, and I remember particularly our fourth day camping out.

My explorations took me further than I had intended, so it was late afternoon when I began to make my way back to camp. I had been lucky enough to find quite a large supply of the soft fruit, similar to Earth pears, growing on prickly shrubs at the bottom of a sunny slope where the warmth had ripened them. Before our equipment had been stolen we had managed to test only a very few foods as fit for Human consumption, and this had been one of them. I ate quite a number, to save carrying them, and then filled my pockets and arms with as many as I could hold. I had had plenty, reasoning that if I didn't eat the Captain and I would have to share those I returned with. If I ate my fill he could have most of those I carried back.

There was a lack of anything from which to improvise a container, although I could have used my jumpsuit if I had climbed out of it, but we didn't need that much fruit all at once, and we could always come back for more if we wanted it. I reckoned they would keep better on the bush, anyway.

Pleased with my crop, and pleasantly full after my peary feast, I trudged back towards our base. Having walked a vaguely circular route, I approached the cave from above for the first time, so saw what hadn't been visible from below. There was a deep hollow in the hill a few hundred metres from the edge of the cliff. It was very overgrown, about fifty metres across and almost circular.

I stopped at the rim and speculated on its origin. It could almost have been a quarry of some kind, but I was convinced it was actually a natural feature. This was partly because there was no evidence of sentient occupation of this planet, but mostly because the topography of the area, similar to that of the limestone karst features on Earth, lent itself to caves, potholes and hollows in the surrounding hills.

The south facing aspect of the hollow, which lay exposed to the star that on this planet acted as the sun, was thick with growth, and I glimpsed the most elusive and tasty of our known safe foods growing about halfway down the thirty metre deep hollow. They were similar to fresh raspberries, glowing deeply red in the sunlight.

When you are fairly hungry, and not sure where the next few meals are coming from, dainty morsels are an opportunity not to be missed. I emptied my arms and pockets of my pears - being not far from home now I knew I could collect them later. I had a good look round; the gentle climb looked safe, so I eased myself over the edge and clambered down to collect the ripe, rosy fruit.

What started out as a simple and sensible climb changed quite suddenly to a situation I knew I should depart from immediately. As I parted two of the thorny bushes to reach for a particularly succulent sample, a small movement caught my eye and a little furry face popped up and looked at me over a tangle of twigs.

I had stumbled inadvertently on a litter of young zats. Zittens, I suppose one would call

them. Their tiny black and white bodies were curled up cosily in that was obviously their den.

The inquisitive one that had poked its nose out to see what had come to disturb their peaceful slumber saw me peering in at it and its siblings, and set up a distressed mewling, yowling wail. If it was calling to its parents, who were presumably out hunting nearby, I knew they couldn't be far away. This was definitely not the place to be found, disturbing the treasured young of a full-grown zat. Common sense and instinct told me to get out of there fast, so I turned and began to make my way rapidly up the slope.

I had hardly taken three steps when an adult zat's head appeared silhouetted against the sky over the rim of the hollow above me. The instant it saw me it let out a screaming howl of rage and sprang in my direction.

I don't remember working out the logistics of angles of projectiles, but instinct must have somehow reasoned that I was over here and it was over there, and it was coming towards me in a long curving arc, and that it would have trouble changing direction or extending its leap in mid air without touching the ground at least once. So if I could remove myself fairly swiftly from the spot which it had aimed at I might have a moment's chance.

A dodge to either side wouldn't have been enough to get me out of its reach, so I did the only thing I could, which was to turn and jump quickly down the slope. In a series of leaps, which were more a succession of short falls, I managed to stay one bound ahead. The third time I touched ground my feet caught in some of the thorny bushes, and I finished the distance to the bottom of the hollow by tumbling and crashing through the branches. I ended up, with a thump that winded me, in a heap on the rocky ground.

The zat was right above me now, taking its time, picking its way round clumps of thorns. Its quarry cornered, it could eat me at its leisure. I scrambled upright to face it, detaching myself from the branches that clung to me. My whole body felt numb from the tumbling bumps and thuds, and I was high on adrenalin. Why do Humans turn to face their death? What could I do?

I prepared to fight it with my bare hands to the bitter end if necessary. It sprang again, straight at me and I heard a phaser whine and the zat's large body crumpled in the air. But momentum carried it on to flatten me, so I ended up under a heavy lump of bone, muscle and fur that I remember thinking smelt very strong.

Captain Kirk's voice called down to me, asking if I was all right, and I answered that I was. He wanted to stay up on the rim where he could keep watch for the zat's mate, which was probably somewhere around. Wise move! I assumed that the Captain's arrival had been triggered by all the howling and yowling of the heavy zat now piled on top of me, and he had come to investigate.

With a few wriggles and huffs and puffs I managed to extricate myself from under the huge, hairy, pungent animal. With adrenalin receding, I began to feel a few of the scrapes and bruises I'd acquired in my headlong plummet down the slope. One cut on my right forearm was particularly annoying, as it bled profusely, and something felt wrong somewhere on my back. I didn't give it much thought until after I'd scrambled up the slope and was dusting myself off.

I saw Captain Kirk, who was swallowing a mouthful of pear while collecting a handful of those I'd left on the ground, drop them all and come swiftly to my side.

"You're hurt!" he said, touching me gently on the elbow and turning me to look at my

back. "It looks as though something has torn your skin."

I tried to turn and look over my shoulder, first one way then the other, but I couldn't turn far enough to see anything. One area, though, over my left shoulder blade, did have a numb feeling which was beginning to tingle in a peculiar way.

"It's nothing," I said. "Just a few scratches and bruises."

But the Captain's eyebrows came together in a frown, and he shook his head. "The whole back of your suit is covered with blood," he told me. "I don't like the look of it. Let's go down and see to it."

Keeping the phaser handy in case the stunned zat should recover, we gathered the pears and set off back to base. Food and energy were still important to us in our isolated state. We made our way obliquely to the river, and followed it along to just opposite our little cave. We stacked the precious pears on a rock, and the Captain turned me round to look at my back again.

"There's a lot of dirt in this," he said. "Get out of that suit and go and rinse yourself in the river. I'll go and get the blanket." And he left.

It was only a few paces to the cave and back, but he waited a decent interval while I got myself organised. I made sure that the pockets of my suit were all empty, then I took off my boots, let down my tangled, muddy hair and climbed out of my suit. My fingers fumbled a few times while doing so; zips seemed problematic, I noticed with a detached sort of surprise. I suppose I actually did feel a bit shaky. Not unnatural, after all that adrenalin.

It was only when I had taken my suit off and brought it round in front of me that I realised why the Captain had been worried. The back really was saturated with blood, and there was a tear on the upper back which was L-shaped and about ten centimetres long. I took the suit into the river with me and began to rinse it thoroughly in the shallows. A small lump of skin detached itself from the suit and floated away down the river.

I really, really didn't like that! It made me feel extremely peculiar, as if my nails itched, if you understand what I mean. I took a deep breath and sat down on a rock for a minute. Now that I was exposed to the cool breeze I could feel warm, sticky blood on my back.

Sitting there wouldn't help. I decided there was nothing for it but action. I pushed myself to finish washing the suit. Cold water didn't do the job very well, but I persevered and finally wrung it out and spread it on some bushes on the river bank to dry. Then I waded out into slightly deeper water and lowered myself into its coolness right up to my chin. For the first time, as the cold water hit it, my back began to hurt.

I hurriedly rinsed my face and hair to wash off dust and had a quick cold bath over the rest of me with nothing to use but my hands. The cut on my arm had stopped bleeding all by itself; it looked as if it was just shallow, and would heal very quickly. I squirmed around until I felt that I had washed most of the mess of blood and soil off my back. I heard the Captain call out that he would bring our precious blanket out to me, so I remained immersed and faced away from him.

"Get dry if you can," he told me, "then come up and I'll see what I can do about a bandage for that wound." Then chivalrously he made himself scarce.

I squelched out of the river, shivering slightly as the wind met my damp skin, and

rubbed myself dry with the blanket. *Good old multipurpose blanket*, I thought. I wrapped it round me like a large bath towel, looped low around my waist at the back so that I wouldn't get blood on it, then I clasped the corners almost up to my neck in front.

I turned my suit over on the bushes; the setting sun and the breeze were already doing their work, but it was still quite damp, so I left it and walked up the slope. I felt tired. Captain Kirk had assembled our limited first aid kit, my handkerchiefs, a strip torn off the edge of the blanket, and our phaser which, on the very lowest setting, could make a reasonable job of sterilising a wound.

"Come and sit down," he instructed, "and I'll take a look."

I sat on our table rock and turned so that my back was partly to the light which came in at the mouth of the cave. I will admit that I was actually quite glad to sit down; the shakiness in my legs had increased substantially, and I had the distinct wobbles, but I didn't think they showed.

I took another deep breath, which ended up more as a sigh, at which the Captain, who stood beside me, placed a hand gently on my head and brushed my wet hair out of my eyes in a very caring gesture, as a father might with a child.

"Hey," he asked, "are you all right?"

I smiled. "I have to admit I'm a bit shaky, sir, but I'm fine, really."

"Good." And he nodded. "Anything you're not telling me about, or is it just your back?"

"That's it, sir," I assured him.

He moved around behind me and I felt him very softly examine the wound at my shoulder blade. "It's not very nice," was his verdict, "but not dangerous. McCoy will probably be able to fix it up so there's no scar, but for now we should just clean and bandage it." After a moment, "Okay?" he asked.

I said, "Uh-huh," but I didn't like the feeling when he prodded around, however gently.

"Small problem," he announced, picking up the phaser and setting it ready to sterilise.

I looked up.

"There's a bit of wood or something caught up in there, and I really ought to remove it," he said, "otherwise you won't start to heal properly." His expression was asking permission to proceed.

"Go ahead, sir," I said, and steeled myself.

It wasn't that it hurt, it wasn't that I'd lost blood; I think it may be that I was more squeamish than I'd thought, but when I felt him lift a flap of skin that had almost become detached, it felt as though he was opening a huge hole into my back. The thought of it, and the feel of him picking up a piece of me and removing the woody material from inside, did something to my mind, and suddenly everything began to go very peculiar.

I remember it now as if it was all in slow motion. I remember the golden rays of the setting sun slanting obliquely, highlighting dust particles that floated in the air. I can still smell

the earthy cave, and hear the hum of tiny insects.

I remember the roughish texture of the blanket against my bare skin, and the rushing noise that grew and grew in my head, obscuring other sounds. And the millions of fuzzy grey bubbles that clouded my vision

I remember thinking, *Stupid woman! Don't you go and faint!* and I fought against it, but there was really nothing I could do, and suddenly I was falling forward.

In a flash the Captain was beside and slightly in front of me, down on one knee, one arm outstretched, preventing me from falling, allowing my lolling head to rest on his shoulder. If he hadn't caught me I would have tumbled to the ground. He held me firmly. The world rotated. I could hear my own breath very loud; prickles of sweat sprang out all over my body.

"Breathe deeply," he said, and gave me a single gentle shake. "Breathe, don't faint. Come on."

I breathed. I gulped air. From the floating, spinning, unreal sensations I gradually came back to myself. Sounds began to return to normal. I controlled a few steadier breaths. My head was still on his shoulder.

Suddenly I didn't want to move away. I could feel the warmth of his body through his shirt, feel the strength of the arm that held me, feel his heart beating in his chest. My breath was full of the scent of him, his fingers were tangled in my hair.

I raised my head, he raised his. Our eyes met. For a long moment we gazed deep into each others souls.

How much can pass between a man and a woman in one glance? In that one look it felt as though we held an eternity of communication. In one instant we were considering the possibility of a physical relationship. We charted a whole phantom life together which imagined a home, children, old age. At the same time we dismissed those dreams as too soon, not right, not yet.

I watched as deep within his mind he grappled with conflicting thoughts and emotions. I saw yearning and the potential for love; the need for a woman, and the restraint of the Captain; the spectre of the shackles of a relationship which might cure the loneliness, but would stifle forever the freedom to explore.

I saw into his head and into his heart, and I think he saw into mine. And suddenly we were just a man and a woman alone on a planet, glad of the closeness and the comfort of another Human being.

And the moment passed, the magic broke, the intensity was gone. I became acutely aware that in my faint I had lost my grip on the blanket, which had slipped down around my waist.

I don't remember who looked away first. We moved a little apart. Then he stood up and turning away slightly tugged at his shirt and cleared his throat, which I found endearing in a way, but neither of us said anything. We didn't seem to need to.

I pulled the blanket up to my chin and buried my face in it for a moment. I was blushing, and didn't want him to see, but he did, and I sensed him smile. He moved around behind me.

"I'll bandage you up," he said quietly, and then sterilised my shoulder with the phaser, padded the wound with my handkerchief and tied it in place with the strip of blanket, which he tied around my arm and neck in a figure eight. Then he worked the blanket up over my shoulders from behind and tucked it around my neck to keep me warm.

"Sleep," he said with a smile in his voice. "You've had quite a day. I'm off to scout around." And with that he placed a hand lightly on each of my shoulders, kissed me quickly on top of the head and left with a spring in his step and humming a happy tune quietly to himself.

We only had one day left before the ship came for us. I was fairly sore, and didn't venture far from the cave. We ate the remaining pears and wasted the day away. In the afternoon he climbed up to the hollow above us. There was evidence that the zats had departed, abandoning their den.

On his way back he came across the smallest of the young, abandoned as the runt of the litter. He searched for the adult zats, in the hope of reuniting the family, but they had gone. It adopted us for our last day and night on the planet and was very playful and tame, having no natural fear of Humans. We fed it pears and hoped that it would survive after we had gone.

The Enterprise returned on time, and suddenly we were back in the hustle and bustle of a busy Starship. Dr McCoy fixed my back. I had to spend three days in Sickbay. He did it so brilliantly there was never even a scar.

I never got my recording case back. I'm saving for another one.

The Xen had vanished completely, and I mean completely. In later years I searched for any mention of them in records, and ours was the only reference. Whether some natural cataclysm overcame their planet, or whether their civilisation declined and was no longer able to support space flight, or whether they died out for some mysterious reason, we shall never know. To this day, they have never been heard of again.

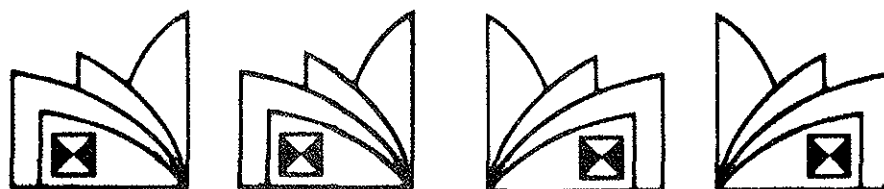
I got teased to death, of course, by my friends, who wanted to know what Captain Kirk and I had been up to alone on a planet for six days. They got what they deserved in return, and we had a few good laughs about missing spacemen and cave dwellers. But I always managed to steer the conversation around to something else.

I don't know if the Captain had any friends close enough to tease him about 'going camping' alone with a 'cute young lady'. I couldn't imagine it was the sort of thing Mr Spock would do. Maybe Dr McCoy.

I was never alone with Captain Kirk again, though in the remaining months before my tour of duty on the Enterprise ended he always had a special smile for me, or a polite inclination of his head if we should happen to pass each other by. I think we understood one another.

When I am an old, old woman I shall sit in my rocking chair and play with my cat in a

home I have not yet chosen. But sometimes I shall smile secretly to myself, because deep in my heart I will always be the young girl who once sat on the sunlit slope of a distant planet in companionable silence with a Starship Captain, while he idly played with a zitten that lay curled up on his knee.



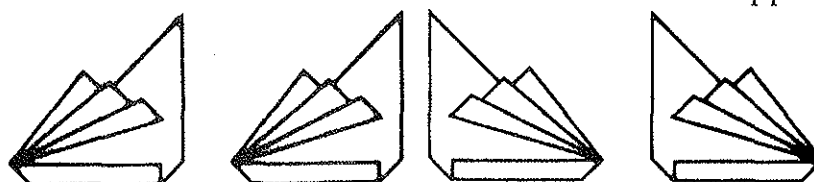
TRIBBLE IN STORE

The level was quiet - no person in sight -
 They all gathered there from the left and the right.
 Thousands and thousands poured in from below,
 From bulkhead to food hatch they seethed to and fro.
 Silently surging they shuffled through doors;
 They crawled on the viewscreens and slid on the floors,
 Then at last they were there at the scene of their crime -
 The doors were just closing, they got through in time.
 Then up to the air vents they wriggled as one;
 The guards did not see them or know where they'd gone.

At the end of the air vent they bounced to the ground;
 Still silent as shadows they shuffled around...
 Then suddenly started a terrible din
 As one had located an overturned bin.
 With mewing and purring and cooing with glee
 They surrounded the wheat store and started their tea
 And happily munched for an hour or so;
 When no wheat remained they decided to go,
 So, fat and contented they moved in a throng.
 They thought they weren't noticed - alas they were wrong.

They were seen by a yeoman who passed by the vent
 And heard all the noise; for the Captain he sent.
 "Oh no!" cried the Captain, "that's all that I need!
 I'll be down in a minute, just stay by that seed!"
 So the yeoman just stood, looking down at the floor
 Till his Captain appeared and said, "Open that door!"
 "But I can't," said the yeoman. "It seems to be stuck!"
 "Move away," said his Captain, "and I'll take a look."
 "Look out!" cried the yeoman - it moved, as he'd feared;
 Under mountains of tribbles - James Kirk disappeared.

Mrs. Pippin



THE ULTIMATE COMPUTER

THE FINAL CHAPTER

by

Ann Neilson

"Come in," Kirk said automatically, without thinking. The cabin door opened; McCoy entered carrying two glasses and a bottle containing a bright orange liquid. "What's this? Another of your better prescriptions?"

"Not this time, Jim. This time I've brought a celebratory drink."

"Oh? And just what are we celebrating?"

"You getting your job back and M5 being packed off back to Starfleet Command." He handed Kirk a glass and proceeded to fill it to the brim, then sat down on the other side of the desk.

Kirk held the glass up to the light, then sniffed the liquid. "I'm almost afraid to ask. What is this?"

"This, my dear Captain, is what is known as a Rigellian Sunburst. Guaranteed to warm the cockles of even a Vulcan heart! Speaking of which, where is our Vulcan First Officer?"

"He's completing his report on M5 for Starfleet." Kirk gingerly sipped his drink. "God, Bones, Scotty could use this to power the warp drive... and then some!" he gasped as the liquid seared its way down his throat and lay like molten lead in the pit of his stomach.

McCoy snorted. "Are you sure he's not just keeping his head down, Jim?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just that he's always on about the superiority of logic over emotion and intuition, yet M5 - supposedly the ultimate in computer technology, designed to keep man from danger - runs amok killing almost 500 people and then lets itself be talked into committing suicide by a mere Human."

"Less of the 'mere', if you don't mind, Doctor. Anyway, aren't you forgetting that the reason M5 acted the way it did was because Daystrom imprinted his engrams onto its circuits - his HUMAN engrams." He emphasised the word 'Human'. "The thing had the equivalent of a nervous breakdown!"

"Well, whatever. Spock's probably mourning the loss of a fellow computer."

"Bones!" There was a flash of anger in Kirk's eyes. "That's enough!"

"I was only joking, Jim."

"Were you? I sometimes wonder whether you understand him even a little."

"I understand him well enough."

"Do you? Do you know what he said to me on the bridge after M5's first manoeuvre, when I stood there feeling like... like Captain Dunsel?"

McCoy shook his head. "Nope."

"Don't tell him I told you - but he said that computers make excellent servants but he had no wish to serve under them. He said a Starship also runs on loyalty to one man - and nothing could replace that or him."

There was a long silence. Then - "Jim, I know how you feel about Spock. I also believe I know how he feels about you... the number of times he's risked his life and career to save you. He would probably explain it away logically as Vulcan loyalty to his commanding officer, but you and I know differently." He paused, considering his next words carefully. "I don't know why I goad him the way I do... No, that's not exactly true, maybe I do. I enjoy it - and I'll tell you something else, so does he! Maybe I do go too far sometimes; I hope not because I wouldn't want to hurt him. You may find this hard to believe, Jim, but Spock and I actually have a lot in common."

"Such as?" prompted Kirk gently.

"Oh, I don't just mean that we're both Starfleet officers, but... This is difficult to explain to anyone else... but we've both erected defensive screens to hide behind. With Spock it's that infernal Vulcan logic of his. With me? Well, with me... I've got a sarcastic wisecrack for every situation. I guess it stops us revealing too much of ourselves, stops us getting hurt. And there's something else, too. The Enterprise. She's more than just a ship... she's a safe haven for us. Here we can escape the past." He stopped and looked intently at Kirk. "Are you getting any of this?"

"Yes, I understand." He nodded. "You and Spock are more than friends, you're like family to me. That's why I hate to see you argue the way you do."

"Did you ever know a family that didn't?"

Kirk laughed. "No, I don't suppose I have."

The door buzzer sounded and Spock entered. "My apologies, Captain, I was not aware that you had company. I shall make my report later."

"That's all right, Spock - but please don't go. Join us." Kirk glanced at McCoy, who immediately got the message.

"Sure, Spock, pull up a chair." Spock sat down. McCoy nodded towards the bottle on the table. "Have a drink."

"No, thank you, Doctor. Vulcans do not imbibe alcohol."

"Come on, Spock, it'll put hairs on your chest."

Spock's eyebrows shot up, exactly as McCoy had known they would. "Dr. McCoy, I fail to understand why you think that would induce me to take a drink. Indeed, if your claim is

true, it is a wonder that you have not long since taken on the hirsute appearance of the ape-like creatures we encountered on Taurus II."

"Don't be so literal, Spock. I was just trying to encourage you to let your hair down and relax."

"Dr. McCoy, I assure you - "

Kirk closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. They were at it again.

Families!!!!



INSCRIPTION ON A MONUMENT

We do not know their names, nor care.
They gave to us a gift more rare
than words can ever mention.

Our souls lay dormant, cold, asleep.
Hearts knew not how to laugh, nor weep,
our feelings in suspension.

Yet for our sakes they would have died,
and by their suffering kept alive
the Mother of our Nation.

Though eons pass, their love we teach
to all the peoples in our reach.
To us they brought salvation.

This stone stands here to honour them
by order of our Foundress, Gem.

Teresa Abbott

This poem first appeared in Log Entries 32, printed 1978.



THE WAY BACK

by

Matthew Conway

HISTORIAN'S NOTE

This adventure takes place during the first season of Star Trek, some time after the events chronicled in the episode "A Taste of Armageddon".

I

The three Starfleet officers sat together in the prison cell, each looking at the others but finding nothing to say. The Captain was at an unusual loss for words, and even the First Officer and the Doctor could not summon the energy to argue over who had been at fault. In the silence, they were left with only their thoughts to keep them company.

How could I have been so stupid? This sort of thing has happened to me on a dozen occasions - not the least of which was on Eminiar VII just a few weeks ago - but I still didn't see the danger signs until it was too late. And now, thanks to my incompetence, we're locked in this cell with no means of contacting the Enterprise and no hope of avoiding the unpleasant fate that the government has doubtless cooked up for us. But I'm damned if I'm going to take it lying down. There's a way out of any trap, and I'm going to find the way out of this one, even if I die in the process. And if my luck continues in its current vein, I may very well end up doing just that.

The cell door opened briefly, bringing the officers to their feet in an instant. Before they could react further, a tray of food was shoved into the tiny chamber and the door closed again. The Spartan combination of bread and water did little to encourage conversation during the meal.

The reaction exhibited by the government is most illogical. We beamed down in good faith to open diplomatic relations with an apparently thriving culture as advanced as late-twentieth-century Earth, yet we have been publically branded as 'undesirables' and incarcerated in this detention block. I must therefore conclude that my preliminary examination of this world was grossly in error, to such an extent that the Captain, the Doctor and I face a seventy-four point two percent probability of being executed within the next twenty-four hours. On the five point two percent chance that we do somehow engineer a means of escape back to the Enterprise, I shall naturally seek to atone for allowing my inaccuracy to endanger the lives of my colleagues.

The meagre dinner eaten, the officers retired to the far end of the cell. They were still hungry, but their thirst had been curtailed for the time being at least. As the lights dimmed with the arrival of the planet's ten-hour night, they prepared themselves for possibly their last opportunity to sleep before facing the punishment of the government.

Damn it, I'm a Doctor, not an escapologist! I only joined this landing party to give the Captain someone else to talk to other than that pointy-eared hobgoblin! What the hell do I know about getting out of heavily-guarded prison cells without so much as a hand phaser? When it comes to that, what the hell do I know about hand phasers apart from pressing the trigger and hoping that you're pointing the blasted thing in the right direction? That's Security's job. I'm supposed to go round afterwards trying to keep everyone alive.

And it doesn't look like I'll even be able to do that if I'm one of the people who needs saving. I knew that security guard should have been on the landing party instead of me. Now look at the trouble my big mouth's got us into.

II

The door was slammed open, and the three Starfleet officers awoke to find themselves in the company of a dozen Enforcers armed with menacing carbines. They were hauled roughly to their feet and pushed out of the cell. The brightly-lit corridor beyond stretched as far as the eye could see.

That food must've been drugged. There was no way I meant to sleep that long, not with our chances of escape diminishing every second. And there's certainly no hope of getting away from these Enforcers - if that's what they're called. We'd be cut down in seconds, even though all those carbines combined are nowhere near as effective or deadly as a single hand phaser. What I wouldn't give to have my phaser back! Or even my communicator. At least we'd be able to contact the Enterprise and beam out of here. Still, a phaser or a communicator is wishful thinking indeed. If I'm going to think of a way back to the ship, I'd better start wishing for something a lot more realistic.

The officers were marched along the corridor at a brisk pace. Both walls contained cell after cell of prisoners, all watching the procession with fearful expressions on their faces. None spoke, and the only sounds came from the booted feet of the Enforcers as they maintained their inexorable march.

Perhaps my error lay not in misunderstanding the available facts but in interpreting incorrect data in the first place. The number of prisoners being held here is far in excess of that which could be expected of a culture at this stage of development. It is becoming more and more evident that the government is anything but the democratic assembly that it purported to be when the Enterprise originally made contact. Indeed, the only term that could be applied to this situation is 'dictatorship'. However, short of freeing ourselves, there is nothing that we can do here. The Prime Directive inviolably ensures that.

The end of the corridor finally beckoned. A massive steel door guarded by a further handful of Enforcers blocked the route, a door that was only opened after a complex verification procedure had been completed. Then, with an audible groan, it slowly opened.

Of all the dumb situations I've landed myself in, this has got to be the dumbest. I'd rather tackle Trelane again than be here, and that shows just what I think about being here at this moment. At least Trelane was so powerful that you couldn't even hope to outwit him for more than a few minutes at a time. These Enforcers - or whatever fancy name they give to thugs on this planet - are nothing better than walking lobotomies, but they're lobotomies armed with rifles I'd rather not put to the test. If we can outfox Trelane, we shouldn't have any trouble with these evolutionary throwbacks. So why the hell can't my vastly superior mind come up with a brilliant plan of escape?

III

The door opened into a spacious manmade cavern some twenty-five metres in length. The far end, although visible, was veiled in shadows where the artificial lighting did not reach. More ominously, the near end housed a row of Enforcers, each armed with a carbine and each standing stiffly to attention.

Think, man, think! Escaping from a firing squad should be child's play after all the stunts I've pulled over the years. All I've got to do is create a diversion. But then what? The only windows in this cavern are

six metres up. Even then, they barely seem wide enough to wriggle through. If we stood on each other's shoulders, one of us might get out, but the other two wouldn't stand a chance, and there's no way I'm going to cut and run on my own. Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be any other option available to me. So the only problem is how to create a diversion when I'm being watched on every side by more Enforcers than I care to count.

The three Starfleet officers were pushed into the cavern and forced to walk to the far end. There, they were positioned firmly in front of silhouette-outlined alcoves that bore ominous bloodstains in significant numbers. Then they were left alone to face the firing squad.

Even at this range, the Enforcers' carbines are more than capable of delivering a deadly round of fire in our direction. In fact, it is more likely that the firearms will malfunction than that their wielders will fail to find their targets, and Vulcans are no less susceptible to high-velocity lead projectiles than Humans. Nevertheless, I still find the government's actions to be curiously illogical. Instead of attracting the Federation's attention by kidnapping and executing three Starfleet officers, it had only to refuse us permission to beam down in the first place. It is to be regretted that I will probably never discover the reason for this intriguing course of events.

The Captain looked at the First Officer and the Doctor, both of whom looked back. There was so much that they wanted to say but no time in which to say it. The Captain merely smiled apologetically, the First Officer briefly bowed his head, and the Doctor adopted his best scowl.

Looks like this is it. God knows I don't want to die, but I've got to admit that I've had a fair crack at the whip over the years, even if I did make a number of mistakes along the way. Getting divorced was one of them, but at least I managed to stay in touch with Joanna, and I hope she'll be able to say with some pride that she was my daughter. Hell, I'll even admit to liking that green-blooded pixie over there, despite that damned infuriating logic of his. And I'll miss the Enterprise as well. Not as much as the Captain, mind, but then she isn't my ship. Still, all good things must come to an end, and this appears to be the end of me. At least I'm not quaking in my boots.

IV

One of the Enforcers at the other end of the cavern stepped forward from the rest. On his order, a score of carbines were raised to shoulder level. When next he spoke, each muzzle was trained on one of the three Starfleet officers.

Hold on a minute! What's happening? Where did this smoke come from? Whatever its source, we'd better steer well clear of it or we'll be dead from suffocation before we're shot. Ropes! We're being rescued! If only I can grab hold of one of them and haul myself out of the Enforcers' line of fire before it's too late. They're coughing their lungs out, but they're bound to squeeze off a few shots as soon as they realise their prisoners are getting away. Got it! And the others are doing the same! We're free! It seems that Lady Luck does indeed preserve heroes, fools and officers of Starships named Enterprise!

The officers hauled themselves out of the cavern and through the narrow windows just as a random volley of shots struck the wall barely a couple of metres below them. They found themselves standing on an open rooftop basking in the early morning sunshine. Beckoning to them as they ran, a handful of the planet's inhabitants were in full flight.

Fascinating. Completely illogical, but nevertheless fascinating. It would appear that our lives have been saved for reasons that we do not comprehend by people whom we do not know. While I cannot truthfully claim that my death would have been a satisfactory conclusion to this mission, the risk to our saviours far outweighs any possible benefits that our rescue will afford them. The Prime Directive forbids us from

interference without the express permission of the government, and I cannot envisage that permission being granted so long as this government remains in power. Indeed, our rescue will serve only to harden its attitude, to the detriment of the remainder of the population.

The officers sprinted after their rescuers. A few metres on, they discovered a rope ladder leading down from the edge of the roof to the ground below them. A few metres beyond that, a hole cut in the security fence gaped invitingly.

Why can't escapes ever be orderly affairs? I'm not sure what's worse: being shot by the government or getting a heart attack through running away from its firing squads. Still, I suppose I should be grateful, even if I do have to climb down a decidedly unsafe ladder, squeeze myself through a fence that looks only too electrified, then somehow elude the inevitable pursuit the government's going to set after us. I haven't had this much exercise in years, and I'm damned if I'm going to go through this all over again if I can help it. It's one thing for the Captain to have to stay at the peak of his fitness, but I'm a Doctor, not an athlete!

V

Climbing down the ladder and easing themselves through the hole in the fence, the Starfleet officers paused momentarily to take stock of their position. Behind them, sirens suddenly began to wail mournfully, while the handful of rescuers were dashing up to a ground vehicle in a questionable state of repair. When they began to gesture for the officers to join them, there was no alternative but to do so.

I hope these brave fools know what they're getting themselves into. They've openly defied a government that has no scruples about executing innocent people, branded themselves as criminals who the authorities will stop at nothing to capture, and risked their lives for those of three strangers who can't possibly help them. I only hope I can find some way to explain to them that they've achieved next to nothing. If I can't, we may find ourselves getting shot anyway, and the fact that it wouldn't be at the hands of the government is no consolation whatsoever. Mind you, judging by the state of their vehicle, I'm not entirely sure our lives aren't still in considerable danger.

The ground vehicle was apparently designed to hold four occupants, but the eight officers and rescuers managed to fit in without too much discomfort. Within seconds, the vehicle was accelerating away from the prison. The gradual quietening and eventual silencing of the alarms was a psychological relief lost on no one but the First Officer.

I confess that I do not understand the apparent elation of my colleagues. We may have escaped from the detention block, but I estimate a fifty-one point nine percent probability that our means of doing so will be discovered within the first ten minutes and a further twenty-seven point three percent chance of our being recaptured within the next two hours. Indeed, unless we can contact the Enterprise and beam back up, I foresee no eventuality in which we can indefinitely elude the government. Patently, however, the Captain and the Doctor do not realise the true situation, so I shall endeavour to elucidate them on the matter as soon as the circumstances allow.

The vehicle continued to speed along the otherwise deserted road. Apart from an occasional rattle, everything ran smoothly. The mood within the vehicle had also lightened considerably, and smiles of gratitude and relief were exchanged between the former captives and their rescuers.

I don't believe it! We actually managed to escape that hell hole! My poor aching body may not have realised it yet, but it sure beats being shot to little pieces by a gang of trigger-happy thugs with a severe xenophobia problem. I'll bet even that stony-faced Vulcan is laughing behind the emotionless wall he calls a face, and I wouldn't blame him one bit. We've been in bad situations before, but that just about beat the best of

them. As soon as we find a way back to the Enterprise, I'm sure as hell going to make sure that everyone knows just how close we came to being turned into Swiss cheese. Maybe bigmouths like me'll shut up and let Security do its job that way.

VI

After some twenty minutes, the vehicle finally left the main road, turning onto a bumpy trail that led ultimately to a seemingly deserted building. As everyone climbed out, one of the building's doors slowly creaked opened. The rescuers motioned the Starfleet officers to enter.

I wondered where we were being rescued to, and now I know. It must be a farmhouse, if only because it's in the middle of nowhere. It does have a sort of farmhouse look about it, though, even if it's unlikely that my untrained eye could recognise an alien farmhouse only five yards away. However, I doubt that any farming's going on here now or has even taken place within the past few years. It's just too perfect a choice for a safe house: remote, spacious, and plenty of opportunity for escape if it's ever discovered. I just hope the government doesn't think the same thing when it decides where to look to find us.

The officers stepped warily through the door and into the farmhouse. Inside, they were greeted by a score of other resistance fighters, each of whom held a hand weapon and eyed them warily. Only when the original rescuers also entered did the tension dissipate once again.

If this group is representative of the resistance being offered to the government, it is little wonder that such a dictatorial balance of power has been achieved. Poorly armed and doubtless untrained even in those weapons that they do possess, I find it hard to believe that their existence has not already been eradicated. Logically, resistance on this level can succeed in achieving little more than further oppressive measures, while the chances of actually gaining significant victories are less than one in ten thousand. It is unfortunate that the Prime Directive forbids us from aiding these resistance fighters, but that is an order that I and my colleagues are sworn to uphold.

The officers were led to an upstairs room via a rickety and rotting staircase. There, against one wall, sat a radio set, primitive but undoubtedly capable of contacting the Enterprise. The First Officer set himself to the task without hesitation.

Well, I'll be damned. I haven't seen anything like that outside a museum. And we're going to try and raise the Enterprise on it as if it's a subspace transmitter with a whole Starbase to power it! We don't know if the ship's in range, in a position to receive, or even scanning for radio signals, yet we're trying to contact a twenty-third-century Starship with a twentieth-century wireless! If the situation wasn't quite so damned desperate, it'd be laughable! I just hope that Vulcan can pull another rabbit out of his hat and come up with the goods. If nothing else, at least he's got the ears for it.

VII

The First Officer needed a half-hour to fine-tune the radio set, but it eventually responded to his deft touch. At the press of a button, a distress signal was transmitted on every available frequency. There was nothing further to do but wait.

This had better work or we're really going to be hard pressed to find a way to communicate with the Enterprise. Short of breaking into one of the government's communications centres, I don't really see what other options are available to us. And while I've had a little practice at raiding twentieth-century military compounds of late - albeit literally a twentieth-century-Earth airbase - I can't say that my record inspires much hope in my ability to repeat the manoeuvre, especially as there'll be no one to rescue me if I get caught again.

However, I can't believe that we won't be heard. The ship's bound to pick up the distress signal, and then it'll simply be a matter of beaming us home.

The Starfleet officers waited for one hour, then another. With the range of their activities severely limited by the Prime Directive, they simply sat and hoped for the best. However, the longer they waited, the less hopeful they became.

I cannot understand why the Enterprise has so far failed to detect the distress signal. Although the radio set is admittedly transmitting on frequencies rendered obsolete since the discovery of subspace communications, it would be most illogical if all frequencies were not being scanned, especially as our failure to report in would clearly demonstrate that we are not in a position to make use of our communicators. It would be equally illogical for the ship to have left orbit, although there is a possibility - no matter how small - that it has been called away by more pressing concerns. Nevertheless, I must admit to a growing sense of curiosity as to the delay in our rescue.

Two more hours crawled by with still no word from the Enterprise. The Captain, more agitated than his colleagues, hauled himself to his feet and stalked out of the upstairs room, leaving the First Officer and the Doctor to themselves. Again, however, neither felt capable of engaging the other in argument over the situation.

The Captain's really taking this badly, and who can blame him? I suppose it must be like having a patient who refuses either to get better or to die, but who just lies there, daring you to give up hope when you know you can't. I'll bet even that elf's beginning to get impatient and annoyed, although God forbid that he should ever get emotional about anything, least of all being stranded on a hostile planet with no way back to the Enterprise. It wouldn't surprise me if he's calculating pi to a thousand decimal places just to pass the time. I can't say I wouldn't like to remain as calm as him, though. All this waiting's pushing my blood pressure higher than those overactive eyebrows of his.

VIII

The Captain walked down the staircase, past the astonished resistance fighters gathered in the room at the bottom, and out of the farmhouse. The heat of the afternoon sun did little to lift his spirits, but the fresh air helped to clear his mind to a certain extent. Even then, however, he was not pleased by the situation that confronted him and his officers.

Why doesn't the Enterprise respond? They must've circled the planet more than a hundred times in the past hour, so there's no chance that they've constantly been in a communications blind zone where our signal can't reach. I just wish I knew what was happening up there. It's so damned infuriating not being in command of a situation. Hang on a minute, though. What're they? Road vehicles? Out here in the middle of nowhere? And they don't seem to be taking their time, which means they're definitely in a hurry to get here, and that's bad news, whoever they are. Resistance fighters on the run from government pursuit? Or the government itself trying to catch us? Something tells me it's about time we all made ourselves scarce.

The Captain dashed back into the farmhouse, yelling warnings to the resistance fighters as he dashed past them and up the stairs. Bursting into the upstairs room, he quickly apprised the First Officer and the Doctor of what he had seen. Whatever hopes of rescue had remained were now vanishing rapidly.

As I thought, the government has indeed managed to locate our whereabouts. The probability of the road vehicles belonging to further resistance fighters is so small as to be statistically insignificant, while the alternative is an almost certainty. However, I believe that we can take some satisfaction from the fact that we managed to remain hidden for twice as long as I initially estimated, and there does exist the possibility - no matter how slight - that we can hold out long enough for the Enterprise to assist us, even if I do not place much

confidence in such an event occurring. This, as the good Doctor would undoubtedly say, appears to be it.

The Starfleet officers hurried back down the stairs to see if there was anything that they could do within the limits of the Prime Directive. However, the resistance fighters had already fallen into a defensive position, two to each window, weapons trained on the vehicles that could be seen approaching in the near distance. The tension in the room had risen to almost unbearable levels as every man and woman recognised that these might well be the final minutes of their lives.

If ever there was a case of "out of the frying pan and into the fire", this has got to be it. It doesn't seem to matter where we go on this planet: wherever we are, the government's trying to shoot us. And thanks to the Prime Directive, there's nothing we can do to help the resistance except stand back and hope for the best. Unless you're a Vulcan, of course, in which case you stand back and compute probabilities, hit-to-kill ratios and whatever other figures are flying round in his head. For all that, he is the best First Officer in Starfleet, even if I'll never tell him that face to face. And there's no better Captain than the Enterprise's. If this doesn't sound too callous, I can't think of anyone else I'd rather die with.

IX

Shots rang out. Windows smashed from fire both incoming and outgoing. The Starfleet officers threw themselves to the floor and crawled behind a heavy table that had been pushed onto its side.

The government certainly isn't taking any half-measures in its attempts to catch us. From the sound of the weapons those Enforcers are using, the resistance fighters must be totally outgunned, and it goes without saying that they're outmanned as well, by about three to one if my guess is anywhere close. Unfortunately, the resistance is all that stands between us and an early appointment with the Grim Reaper, and while I've never believed that a scythe-wielding skeleton would come to collect my soul, the prospect seems to be getting more and more real every second. As for the Enterprise finding us, there's no hope of that now. Our way back is as closed as it ever was.

The exchanges continued, but the resistance fighters were faring badly. First one was hit, then another. With each casualty, the tide of battle swung ever more decisively in the government's favour.

Five minutes, possibly six, but certainly no more. This is a battle that the resistance cannot hope to win, and I doubt that they are unaware of that fact, but still they continue to fight the government's Enforcers. A most illogical decision on their part. While I profess no desire to die, the extra minutes bought by those lives is hardly justified. Indeed, the only victories in this battle are already beyond the reach of the resistance. Their only logical course of action would be to try to flee here, leaving the Captain, the Doctor and me to occupy the Enforcers' attention while they do so. The line between bravery and foolhardiness is a narrow one, and I fear that it has been crossed in this instance.

There were now only two resistance fighters still capable of returning the Enforcers' fire, but their efforts were insufficient to prevent the government's forces from advancing to the very door of the farmhouse. The officers, sensing danger, scrambled to the staircase and began to climb it, hissing warnings to their defenders. However, they were too late: a stun grenade dropped through a broken window and wrought its damage on even those two final resisters.

Damn! That blast nearly blew my eardrums through the side of my head! My ears are still ringing like mad, and I'll lay odds of fifty to one that they're perforated to hell. It's a good job I wasn't any closer to that grenade when it went off, though, otherwise I'd be as senseless as those two poor devils down there. And while my weapons knowledge is as reliable as my warp-drive engineering skills, I'm certain that it was set for

more than a simple stunning blast. They'll be lucky to escape being completely deafened, not that they'll probably live long at the hands of those Enforcers anyway. And I've no idea why we're running upstairs. Our goose is well and truly cooked now, and that's no mistake.

X

As the Starfleet officers stumbled into the upstairs room, the sound of booted feet could be heard taking up positions downstairs. There was no escape. Then, suddenly, a familiar tingling sensation made itself known.

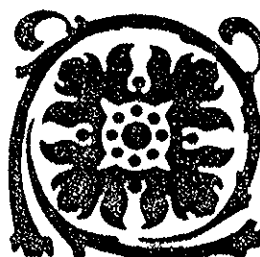
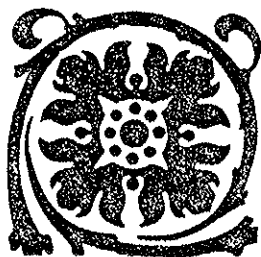
A transporter beam! We're being beamed out of here! The Enterprise found us! They actually found us! That's twice we've cheated death today, and I can't say that familiarity makes the feeling any easier to handle. We'll be safely aboard the ship in a few seconds now, and my first act will be to declare this planet strictly off limits to all Federation vessels for at least the next decade. If this is the way the government treats diplomatic envoys seeking peaceful contact, there's no telling what it would do to a merchant ship. I can only feel sorry for this world's inhabitants. There's so much we could do for them, but our hands are tied by the Prime Directive, and that's the final word on the subject.

The tingling sensation grew, spreading throughout every fibre of the officers' bodies. A rising whine also began to sound as the transportation process started to take effect. The room began to fade in a coruscating pattern of light.

Intriguing. Why the Enterprise was able to locate us at this precise moment when we needed it most is a question that I will have to put to those in charge of the rescue operation. There is nothing inherently different about the situation as it would be perceived by those aboard the vessel, yet, for some reason, our transportation was not executed until now. I presume there must have been some problem with the transporter itself, a problem that must not be allowed to occur again so long as the potential for disaster exists. In all, an illogical conclusion to a most illogical affair, one that is also worthy of closer examination at a later date. I am sure that Federation sociologists will find it most interesting.

The room slowly faded from view. Nanoseconds later, the familiar sight of the Enterprise's transporter room appeared before the officers' eyes. The red-shirted figure standing behind the transporter console smiled broadly as they materialised, a sight as welcome as any over the previous twenty-four hours.

Sweet mother of Jesus, we made it! I may have aged five years during the past day, grown a hundred new grey hairs, and stared death in the face more times than I ever wanted to in my whole life, but we're back aboard the Enterprise now, and that's all that matters. I'll have to give the Captain and that walking computer a physical before they report back to duty, and I might as well get M'Benga to give me the once over while I'm at it, but there shouldn't be anything wrong that a good night's sleep won't put to rights. And as for that transporter, I promise I'll never curse the thing again. At least, I'll never curse it so long as it always finds us the way back. And right now, I'm just about ready to believe anything!



AM I OR NOT?

by

Katrina Heintz

It was the end of the day for Alpha shift. Most were relaxing in theg rec room, eating, playing games or watching 3V. Several of the Bridge crew were at the food selectors getting their evening meal.

"The Captain's in a bit of a snit again today," Scott whispered to the others, conscious of Dr McCoy at a nearby table.

"He's been that way for the last few days, since that asteroid business," Sulu added, collecting his tray.

"If there's anything wrong Dr McCoy will sort it out," cautioned Uhura, taking her turn at the selector.

"You're right, lass. It's best we leave well alone for now. Speaking of the Captain, here he comes."

They moved away to their table as Kirk walked over. "Evening, Captain," they chorused as they left.

"Good evening," Kirk replied as he punched in a code. Nothing happened. He repeated it; again, nothing. He tried a second code, and the machine delivered a fresh salad.

"Bones!" snapped the Captain. "You've changed my diet again."

"Your weight was up again, remember, so it's salads for a while," answered McCoy, looking up from his own meal.

"I hate salads!" Kirk grumbled in reply, sitting down moodily across the table from the Doctor and reluctantly eating his salad.

"Jim," McCoy said as he finished his meal, "you've been snapping at everyone for the last couple of days. Do I have to pull medical rank for you to come and talk to me?"

Kirk looked up at the Doctor, then around the room; they were in the quietest corner, none of the crew were near them.

"Okay, Bones." Hesitating for a moment Kirk said, "It's Miramanee."

"There was nothing we could have done, you know that. Her injuries were too severe."

"I know, I know."

"Then what's on your mind?" McCoy persisted.

"If I hadn't been there she wouldn't have been pregnant, and I wouldn't have been the cause of her being stoned."

"Look, Jim, it wasn't your fault. If we hadn't been there to stop that asteroid they would all have died."

"I know that too, but I still feel that I caused her death," Kirk answered softly, pushing his food around the plate and avoiding the Doctor's gaze.

"Jim, you must accept her death. You were not the cause of it, just part of the circumstances leading to it. No one person or thing was the direct cause. To use an old cliché, it was meant to be."

Kirk suddenly looked across to the far side of the rec room, puzzled. "What's going on over there?" he asked in an attempt to distract the Doctor.

"The recreation department has programmed the 3V to accept old 20th century movies from Earth. That looks like one of the classics, 'It's a Wonderful Life'."

"Oh, that one. I didn't know you were an old movie buff, Bones."

"Well, James Stewart is one of my favourites," McCoy answered sheepishly, looking at the screen and paying more attention to it than to the Captain; he was completely distracted from their conversation.

Not wanting to push his luck, Kirk rose from the table. "Well, I'll leave you to it. I'm off to my cabin for an early night. See you in the morning."

"Mmm. 'Night, Jim."

Kirk smiled. The good Doctor was well and truly involved with the movie on the screen. He wandered out of the rec room and along the quiet corridors to his cabin, going over what McCoy had said.

Had he really been only a pawn in a larger game, or did he believe that if he had not been there somehow Miramane would have survived? Entering his quarters he absently prepared for bed, stopping in mid action as he thought of what would have happened had he not been there at all.

No, that was nonsense. The Doctor was right - there was nothing anyone could have done. Ordering the lights off he drifted into sleep.

Kirk woke suddenly. His cabin lights were on, and a voice came from the doorway.

"Who are you, and what are you doing in my cabin?" the stranger asked.

"What do you mean, your cabin? These are my quarters as Captain of the Enterprise." Now completely awake, Kirk swung off his bunk, activating the intruder alarm by his side.

The stranger laughed. "Captain of the Enterprise? That's a fine story, but untrue."

"Untrue!" Kirk snapped, moving around the intruder, who followed in a bizarre dance. "It's you who seems to be the story teller," he continued, moving to keep the doorway clear.

Perching on the corner of the desk, the intruder smiled winningly and replied, "Maybe

we can settle this amicably?" slipping his hand down to activate a switch by his side.

The cabin door opened quietly to admit Spock and a Security detail holding armed phasers. Before Kirk could speak the intruder walked forward.

"Ah, Spock. We have a visitor. He seems to be under the impression that he is the Captain of this ship."

Recovering, Kirk ordered, "Security, place this man in the Brig; and Spock, I want answers on how he got on board."

Spock turned to Kirk and raised an eyebrow. "Security," motioning the detail forward, "escort this man to the Brig." He indicated Kirk.

"Spock, what are you doing? That's the intruder, not me."

The Security men gathered round to remove Kirk from the room.

"I'm the Captain!" Kirk shouted at them as he was pulled away struggling.

"I recommend we have Dr. McCoy scan the prisoner before we question him," the Vulcan advised as he watched the struggling man being herded along the corridor. "Also that full security measures be taken until we know how he managed to gain entry without alerting any of the alarms."

"I agree," answered his companion. "Ask the Doctor to examine him, then join me for a briefing in fifteen minutes," he added as he left the cabin. "I'll be on the Bridge."

"What do you mean, Spock, that we have someone in the brig who thinks he's the Captain?" McCoy stared at Spock.

"Exactly what I said, Doctor. The Captain entered his cabin and found on his bunk this person who believes he is the Captain of this ship, and knows its crew."

"How did he get on board in the first place, since I presume he isn't one of the crew?"

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow at McCoy. "Clearly he is not a crew member; how he arrived on board is what we must determine." He led the way out of Sickbay.

"Well we'd better get on with it," grumbled the Doctor, following.

Kirk paced as far as his confinement allowed, anger in every line of his body. What had happened? None of the crew he had seen knew him; even Spock did not recognise his Captain. Kirk stopped as he heard footsteps coming along the corridor, and looked through the doorway.

"It's about time you got here, Bones. I don't know what Spock thinks he's doing, but that man in my cabin is the impostor, not me."

"That man', as you refer to him, is Captain Steven Winters, who has been Captain of this vessel for the past four years," Spock replied. "Please stand back from the doorway." He

indicated to the Security men to deactivate the forcefield, allowing Dr McCoy to enter.

Kirk stared at the Vulcan. "You must be out of your mind, Spock. I took over this command four years ago from Chris Pike. I've never heard of Captain Winters." Hazel eyes blazed at the First Officer, but Kirk moved back as the Doctor began his examination.

"You believe me, Bones?" he asked.

Ignoring him, McCoy scanned the prisoner again.

"Bones?" Kirk persisted.

"Well, you're Human, by these instruments anyway, but whether you're telling the truth is another matter," the Doctor replied, checking his instruments again as he left the cell.

"Of course I'm Human, Doctor. I'm James T. Kirk, Captain of the USS Enterprise and your friend for many years." Kirk did not believe what he was hearing. Even McCoy did not believe his story. What was going on around here?

"If you have finished, Doctor, we must report to the Captain." Spock interrupted Kirk's angry statement, activating the forcefield behind McCoy before Kirk could prevent the Doctor from leaving.

"Yes, he's not a patient man."

"Spock, McCoy, listen to me. *I am* the Captain, can't you see it?" Kirk shouted after them in frustration. "I'm in command here, not him."

But the two officers were out of earshot; only the two Security men were in sight. They moved as far away as they could from the seemingly mad creature in the cell.

"Report, Doctor," Captain Winters ordered as his senior officers took their places around the briefing room table.

"The person we have in the Brig is Human. To be certain if he's sane, I'll need to do further tests. He has a very strong belief in his story."

"Spock, any answers on how he got on board?"

"None at present, Captain. Scans show no vessels or energy readings indicating transportation. Certainly the ship's security systems were not activated on his arrival. We did not know of his presence until you discovered him." The Vulcan was clearly puzzled by the anomaly.

"Any chance he could be an alien who can assume Human form, with telepathic abilities?" queried Winters.

"Telepathy would explain how he seems to know us," mused McCoy.

"No, Doctor. I have felt no probing from an alien mind, and your tests showed he is Human. If he was a creature who could assume other forms, it would take considerable energy - mental or physical - to fool the instruments. The creature would not be able to hold

the form for an extended period."

Suddenly the intercom sounded. "Security to Captain."

"Winters here."

"The prisoner has attempted to escape, sir, and has been injured by the forcefield."

"Any other injuries?"

"None, sir. Just the prisoner."

"Dr McCoy is on his way." Switching off the intercom Winters followed McCoy, who was already leaving the room, motioning Spock to accompany him.

"What happened?" he asked one of the guards as McCoy entered the cell.

"He seemed to collapse, sir. I decided to send in a Security man to check before summoning medical aid, and deactivated the forcefield," the officer in charge reported. "As the field went down he rushed the doorway. My hand was still on the switch and I immediately reactivated the shield, catching the prisoner partly through the doorway. He fell back into the cell unconscious."

Turning from the Security Officer, Winters watched as McCoy finished his examination and left the cell.

"He's certainly determined to prove something," McCoy said, putting his instruments away before continuing. "He'll be out for a while, but there's no permanent damage."

"It still doesn't answer the question of who he is and how he got on board." Winters paced back and forth in front of the Brig. "I want answers, gentlemen - and soon." He walked away, leaving Spock and McCoy staring after him.

"Well, Spock, it looks like we've been put in the hot seat." The Doctor turned to the Security man. "Have him transferred to Sickbay. I want to do further tests."

"I also have theories to test, Doctor," the Vulcan stated as he followed Winters down the corridor.

As Jim Kirk came to he realised he was in Sickbay, secured to a diagnostic bed. *Fool!* he thought. *Getting caught in the forcefield of the cell door.* He let his gaze wander around.

Sure enough, a Security man was stationed nearby. They were not taking any chances with him. Physically the ship looked the same, but what he could not understand was his officers' disbelief in him - or what seemed to be his officers.

"Well, you're with us again," said McCoy as he came into view, checking the monitors above the bed. "There don't seem to be any ill effects."

"Bones, look, *I am* Jim Kirk. I'm not an alien posing as a Human. I didn't just materialise here." Straining against his restraints, Kirk tried to get up.

"Just you lie still and tell me exactly who you think you are," said McCoy, leaning on a nearby bed.

"As I've said repeatedly, James T. Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise for the last four years. I succeeded Captain Christopher Pike to the command. You're my Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy. Spock is my Science Officer and First Officer." There was more than a touch of exasperation creeping into Kirk's voice.

"According to Starfleet and Federation records, there is no trace of any person by that name," put in Spock as he entered the room.

Kirk stared at the Vulcan First Officer as he approached the bed. "But what about my brother Sam and his family, Spock?" Kirk looked hopefully at the Vulcan.

"I did not check family records.

"My brother was George Samuel Kirk; Aurelan was his wife, and Peter's his son."

"One moment." Turning to a nearby computer terminal, Spock activated the screen. "Computer, run Federation records on the following: George Samuel Kirk; Aurelan Kirk; Peter Kirk."

"Working." After a few seconds of activity the computer replied, "Completed. George Samuel Kirk and family were killed on the planet Deneva Stardate 3287.2."

"But that's not true," whispered Kirk. "Peter survived that attack, he's alive on Earth. Sam and Aurelan were killed by the creatures that attacked you, Spock."

"I was attacked on Deneva before we destroyed the creatures, but we did not save any of that family."

Renewing his struggles against the restraints, Kirk turned to McCoy, confused. "It can't be true. I was there! Bones, you knew Sam and his family."

"I'm sorry, I didn't know Mr Kirk or his family." McCoy was embarrassed; this man genuinely believed what he was saying.

Still struggling to escape the straps holding him down on the bed, Kirk failed to notice Spock's approach. Then everything went black.

Winters sat in the command chair staring at the main view screen, impatiently drumming his fingers on the arm rest. The Bridge crew busied themselves with their work; the Captain was not in a pleasant mood with this intruder being found on the ship.

"Well?" he snapped as the Vulcan entered the Bridge.

"Records show that the person James Kirk does not exist."

"No information on his mode of arrival?"

"None, Captain. All scans are negative."

"Spock, he must have come from somewhere. All I'm getting are questions and no answers." Winters was definitely unhappy at the situation; he did not like loose ends. Perhaps if they had a meeting with the prisoner it might throw some light on the problem.

"I want a briefing with all senior staff and the prisoner in thirty minutes. Uhura, please arrange it." Turning away he left the Bridge, hearing Uhura's voice informing the other officers of the meeting.

The second time Kirk woke in Sickbay he found McCoy removing his restraints. What was going on now? he wondered.

"So you finally believe me?" he smiled. "That's a relief. I was beginning to think I was going crazy." Kirk swung off the bed and stretched; it felt good after being tied down for so long.

"No, I don't," McCoy replied. "You're going to have a little chat with the Captain."

"About time! This has gone far enough." Pleased at last to be getting somewhere, Kirk started for the door, but stopped as he saw four Security men waiting for him. *Well*, he thought, *I'm not going to argue with four Number 2 phasers*. Half turning, he looked at the Doctor. "After you," he said somewhat sarcastically as he let McCoy precede him out of the room, followed by his 'guard of honour'.

The full Bridge crew, with several more Security men, were assembled in the main briefing room when Kirk entered with McCoy. Winters sat at the long table with the Bridge crew, facing a lone chair set in the middle of the room. The Security men were arranged around the room; Kirk's four guards stayed outside.

"Ah, Mr Kirk, please take a seat." Winters indicated the lone chair.

McCoy moved over to the table and sat down.

Kirk sat in the chair. His feeling of dislike for this person who had somehow taken his command intensified; it looked as though there was going to be a kangaroo court, with himself as the victim.

Winters nodded to Spock. "Computer on. This is an official inquiry into the appearance of the person known as James T. Kirk on this vessel."

Turning to Kirk Spock said, "Please place your right hand on the plate and state your name for the record."

Kirk felt he was on a strange merry-go-round having the same question asked of him time and time again. "Why?" he asked. "I've already told you who I am." Anger was turning to confusion and frustration.

"Please state your name for the record," Spock repeated.

This is useless, Kirk thought. "James T. Kirk," he replied tonelessly.

Winters leaned forward and placed his chin on a clenched fist. The computer would have sounded an alarm at any discrepancy. "So it seems you are telling the truth about your

name. Now how did you get on board?" The computer should sound on this one.

"I've already told you. I arrived on board - AS CAPTAIN - in the usual manner, by transporter." *No, not useless, he thought. It's ridiculous - definitely a kangaroo court. They can't disprove my story one way, so they try another.*

Again the computer remained silent.

"Can you name these officers?" Winters snapped.

"Commander Spock; Lieutenant-Commander McCoy; Lieutenant-Commander Scott; Lieutenant Uhura; Lieutenant Sulu; Ensign Chekov." Kirk reeled off the command crew's names.

Silence fell over the room. Winters stood up, his chair falling to the floor behind him, and strode over to Kirk. This was a great idea - the prisoner proving he told the truth with every word he spoke. People in certain quarters were going to love it if he failed.

"Okay, let's take this from another direction." Trying hard to calm his growing anger at being made a fool of, Winters stopped in front of Kirk. "All tests say you're Human, not telepathic as far as we know, and you say you know my senior officers and my ship. So where does that leave us now?"

"Back at the beginning, I suppose." Kirk did not know what to think. This was getting crazier by the minute. His officers just sat there doing nothing as if they were just for show, Winters taking all the credit.

"Captain," Spock interrupted, "I have a theory." He hesitated.

"Well, Spock, get on with it!" spat Winters, clearly not pleased at the interruption.

"As we can detect no evidence of how Mr Kirk transported on board, and his evidence so far indicates that he is stating the truth as to his identity, I propose that he is who he says he is - but in another dimension."

"Aye, sir, that would explain it. We know they do exist," added Scott, speaking for the first time.

Winters turned on his Chief Engineer and First Officer, anger turning his handsome face ugly. "Mr Scott, please remain silent! Spock, I don't like that theory. I still say he is an alien being transported here by some means."

Clearly Winters wanted only his own version to go into the records; he was not interested in any other possible explanation from his officers.

"Sir, I must differ. None of the facts fit your conclusion. The only explanation is that Captain Kirk is the Captain of the Enterprise in his own dimension."

The Vulcan stood facing his Captain in a silent battle of wills. Time seemed to stand still for what felt like an eternity to the occupants of the room. Abruptly Winters turned away from Spock, not able to hold his gaze.

What kind of man was he, thought Kirk, not taking advice from his own senior officers, even to the point of ordering them to keep silent? 'Glory hunter' was the phrase that sprang to

mind, that fitted Winters perfectly. *If the situation had been reversed, surely I would have done things differently*, Kirk wondered to himself.

Just as abruptly Winters looked back at the table where his officers sat. Defeated, he looked at Spock.

"I accept your wild theory," ice dripped from his voice, "that our visitor is from another dimension. The question now is, how does he get back to it?"

"At this point I have no further hypotheses."

Kirk sat as if frozen. He was in another dimension, trapped, unable to get back to *his* ship and crew. There must be some way. Spock had proved his identity; surely he could find a way for Kirk to go home. He had managed it once before; he could do it again. Coming back to the present he realised that Winters was speaking.

"Meanwhile, until you do find a way to send him back, I want our visitor confined to the Brig. You may trust him, Spock, but I do not. He is to be kept there until we send him back, or until we reach the nearest Starbase." Turning from Spock he gave Kirk a long, penetrating look and walked from the room.

Silence followed for what seemed to Kirk like hours. Then a shout erupted from McCoy. "So you were telling the truth. You do command this ship."

The other officers gathered round Kirk, smiling. It was almost like home, he thought - apart from the Security guards.

"I do indeed, Bones. But Spock, have you really no idea of how I can get home?"

"None, Captain Kirk, but I shall continue to search."

"That's all I can ask for, Spock."

Spock looked at Kirk apologetically before signalling the Security men forward to escort him back to the Brig. The Vulcan followed behind, and McCoy accompanied them along the corridor, distracted.

"Captain." McCoy looked embarrassed. "I'd like to offer my apologies for what has happened."

"There's nothing to apologise for, Bones. You did what you should have done, in this dimension and in mine."

When they arrived at the cell one of the Security men deactivated the forcefield to allow Kirk to enter. Before he did so, Kirk turned to McCoy.

"Can you answer a question for me?"

"I'll try."

"On the ship's last mission we - I mean you - had to destroy an asteroid."

"Yes, we did." McCoy looked at Spock, wondering what Kirk wanted.

"There was a High Priestess of the village that was surveyed - Miramanee. What happened to her?" Kirk looked from the Doctor to the Vulcan and back again, willing one of them to answer.

"Captain Kirk, the woman known as Miramanee died on that planet. I am sorry." Spock's face was unreadable.

"No," Kirk whispered. "I wasn't there. She should have lived."

"She was stoned to death in front of the obelisk." Winters stepped out from behind the bulkhead where he had been listening to the conversation. "With her husband," he continued.

Kirk couldn't stand the man any longer. Making a lunge for Winters, Kirk tried to throw a punch at his face, attempting to remove the smirk that seemed permanently fixed there. The punch never landed. Several Security men grabbed his arms and Kirk was pulled back, struggling against their grip.

No... Miramanee should have lived... He hadn't been there... Winters must be wrong...

He fought the restraining guards as they pulled him further away from that grinning face.

NO! he thought...

"NO!"

Kirk sat up, shouting aloud to a darkened room which lit as the computer sensed that he was awake. Cold sweat ran down his face. As he wiped it away he realised where he was. He was not in the Brig but in his own quarters, all his belongings around the room. The door buzzer sounded. Startled, Kirk stared at for a long moment before answering.

"Come!"

The door slid open silently to admit Dr McCoy carrying a bottle and two glasses.

"Oh good, you're still awake," he said, placing the bottle and glasses beside the bunk. "I thought this would help the conversation along."

"What conversation, Bones?"

"Our little chat that we started in the rec room earlier."

"Mmm, that one." Kirk watched as McCoy perched himself on the edge of the bed. Now fully awake, he pulled himself into a sitting position and faced the Doctor.

"Now where were we?" McCoy handed over a filled glass.

"Bones..." Kirk hesitated. "You were right, I'm not to blame." Lifting his glass he drank deeply before continuing, "I wasn't the cause of her death, I accept that now."

Staring at the wall he thought, *I really made no difference to how she died. No difference at all.*



FRIENDS IN NEED

by

Sandy Catchick

That rare commodity, R&R, had finally been granted to the over 400-strong crew of the Starship Enterprise. It was their reward for a successful mission on the borders of the Neutral Zone. The mission would never be recorded in the annals of history. The self-destruction of a Romulan vessel complete with all hands left no evidence and the Enterprise's official log would remain a Starfleet secret. Nevertheless, a Romulan/Federation War had been averted and one man's personal Romulan/Earth history had been re-shaped.

Captain Kirk had been looking forward to taking this leave with his First Officer. The Romulans had turned out to bear an uncanny resemblance to Vulcans, and his First Officer had borne the brunt of the suspicion this raised among some of the crew, since he was the only Vulcan on board. Doctor McCoy had been worried about the effects of leaking coolant fluid on the Vulcan's lungs, when he had risked his life entering the damaged phaser room to fire the Enterprise's phasers manually at the Romulan warbird, and to save Stiles, his erstwhile antagonist. James T. Kirk had been concerned about the effects of such open scorn and bigotry on the so well-hidden feelings of his Vulcan friend. They both agreed that what Spock needed was a quiet, restful shore-leave, camping out with his Captain in the wildlife parks of Greater Menitis. Unfortunately, Spock had not been party to that agreement.

Captain Kirk approached McCoy's office with some trepidation. Spock had not only turned down his offer to go camping together, but had insisted that he wished to take shore-leave alone. Kirk felt rejected by the cold, aloof front Spock presented to him but on another level was aware that Spock withdrew behind the Great Wall of Vulcan when he was most deeply hurt or most strongly disapproving. He thought Spock needed to talk things through but he couldn't force the Vulcan to do that. One thing they had in common was stubbornness. Spock had made up his mind and nothing was going to change it. Bones often had his own ideas on the psychology of a half-human, half-Vulcan First Officer. Kirk hoped he'd come up trumps this time.

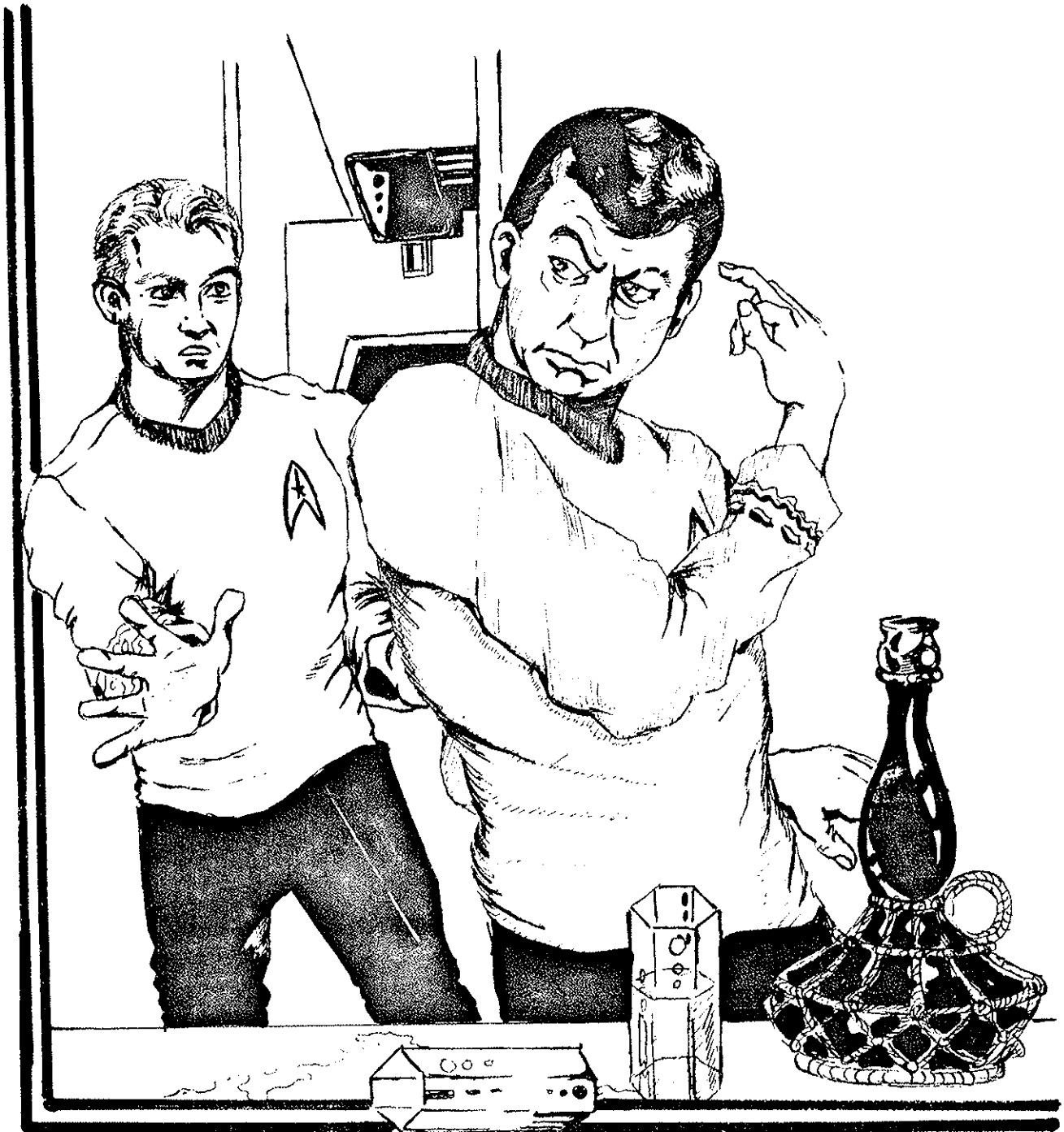
The Doctor was seated in his office, his inner sanctum, when Kirk approached. He had a bottle of Saurian brandy on the desk in front of him, and a half-full tumbler in his hand. Kirk grinned at him affectionately.

"Hi, Bones. I figured you'd be saving that," he indicated the brandy bottle, "for your shore-leave."

McCoy muttered an unintelligible reply. Kirk looked at him more closely and decided that perhaps Bones needed his company even more than Spock. The doctor looked tired and depressed, and the almost empty bottle told its own story. Kirk changed what he had been about to say.

"I was wondering if you'd go on shore-leave with me. We could do the rounds. I hear tell there are some pretty sophisticated joints down there. You look like you could use a break."

"Good of you to notice," returned the Doctor sarcastically. "What about Spock? I can't see him pub-crawling. Or would he do that for you too, Jim?"



Martin Street 92.

Kirk opened his mouth to retort angrily, but stopped himself by taking a deep breath and reminding himself that McCoy had had too much to drink.

"You're right, Bones. Spock wouldn't know how to live it up, not even on Wrigleys. He's got his mind set on taking this shore leave alone. I'm worried about him, but I guess he knows what's best for him. Perhaps time is what he needs. What do you think?"

McCoy stood up. Rather, he hauled himself into an almost upright position, still leaning heavily on the edge of his desk. His eyes were red-rimmed from drink and lack of sleep. Kirk noticed he'd not shaved that morning. It dawned on him that something was terribly wrong. He'd been so worried about Spock when he'd come in that he hadn't really paid much attention to McCoy.

"I'll tell you what I think, Jim-boy. I think you should take this shore-leave and stick it" The next few phrases were unprintable.

Kirk was shaken. "Bones, what's wrong? Something must have upset you."

"Don't you Bones me. You only come here when you want something, so don't you Bones me. What am I? Second best to a pointed-eared, green-blooded machine with printed circuits where his heart should be? Spock turned you down, so you come crawling to me. Vulcans don't know the first thing about friendship or love. They'll have no truck with honest-to-goodness feelings. What did you expect when you offered your friendship to a Vulcan? I warned you it would be on his terms. I told you you'd be the one who ended up hurt. It's always those who care who get hurt. Don't you know that by now, Jim? Serves you right for putting your nose in where it wasn't wanted. Has Spock ever spoken to you about friendship?"

"He doesn't have to, Bones. You know how hard it is for him to put things into words. Has he said something to upset you?"

"Him! Why should he upset me? Do I get upset by my table? Does my medical tricorder rile me? Why should a walking computer upset me, just because it can talk? To get upset you've got to feel. If you don't feel you don't get hurt. Spock doesn't have feelings, remember. It's you that's hurt, Jim. Because you care it hurts you when he won't go on leave with you. He doesn't care. Machines and Vulcans are quite okay alone. Friendship is a two-way thing, Jim. You think you can come here and let me pick up the pieces when your Vulcan's let you down. Well it won't work. Not any more. I'm sick of picking up other people's pieces. I'm sick of being second-best to a computer with pointed ears. So get out and leave me to my bottle."

"Bones ..."

"Just get out, Jim. Before one of us says something he'll really regret."

"Bones ..." he tried again.

"Go!"

James Kirk turned away. Then he groaned out loud. Standing in the doorway was Spock. He didn't know how much the Vulcan had heard, but he knew from the way the Vulcan's eyes slid away from his that Spock had heard more than enough.

McCoy, too, spotted the Vulcan. He threw his almost empty tumbler and it crashed into the wall above the door, spraying Spock with broken glass.

"You get out too, Spock. That's what comes of having overgrown ears. You hear things that are best left unheard. I envy you. I never believed that old Human saying 'Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me'. But I can see now that it was written for Vulcans. Go on! Get out before I say anything else."

The Vulcan withdrew immediately. James Kirk went after him. "Spock" he called. He didn't expect Spock to stop and was surprised when the measured steps halted. The eyes that met his were devoid of emotion. Kirk cringed at their blankness. "I'm sorry, Spock. Bones didn't mean what he said. That was the drink talking."

"Indeed."

Kirk's head came up. There was something in Spock's tone. He couldn't identify it. But it wasn't what he'd expected. The Vulcan did not appear angry, only very very sad.

"Spock?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"He didn't mean it, Spock."

The response was very quiet. "I know, Jim. But he was right."

"Spock?"

The Vulcan had already turned away and was retreating down the corridor. Kirk didn't have the heart to go after him again. What more could he say? McCoy had said it all. But he was doubly concerned now, about both his friends.

McCoy slid back down into his seat and laid his head on his folded arms. He'd really torn it this time. That's what you got for caring. He'd learned his lesson the hard way. He wanted Jim and Spock to know before they went too far. If you didn't care you didn't get hurt. The trouble was, he cared. He cared too much.

He stooped to the bin and retrieved the paper he'd screwed up and thrown in it - was it only half an hour ago? He painstakingly unwrapped the scrunched-up ball and straightened the creases with his thumb nail. Then he read it again.

"Dr. Leonard H. McCoy

I write to advise you formally that your divorce has been filed with Starfleet Command in accordance with Personnel Manual 542 Regulation 53 a). Your wife will keep custody of your daughter, Joanna Anne McCoy, *ibid*, Regulation 53 d). You are now officially a single man and your pay and pension details will be amended on computer records accordingly."

The stupid paper sounded just like the Vulcan at his most official. Quoting rules and regulations till he was blue in the face - or was that green in the face? McCoy smiled at his own joke. But the smile soon faded. He was alone now. For a moment he wished he were Vulcan. At least Spock didn't turn to drink and fall to pieces before everyone's eyes when he was hurt. But was it any better to retreat into oneself? McCoy gave it further thought and decided it was not. He concluded that he owed Spock an apology. The trouble was, when he stood up to go and tell the Vulcan so, his head began to swim. Luckily Chris Chapel walked by

just as he knocked the bottle to the ground and slumped back in the chair.

She came in to investigate. Her eyes lit on the broken glass and she tut-tutted as she came forward to help McCoy. Then her eyes spotted the piece of paper on the desk. She read the clinically cold words and her heart ached for her superior and mentor. "Everything will look better in the morning, Doctor," she said wisely as she got him to his feet and escorted him over to the put-you-up bed. McCoy didn't hear her words, but the softness of her voice reached him.

"Why, Sarah, why?" he whispered. "I really cared. But I've learned my lesson. I'll never care again."

He fell into a fitful sleep and never heard Christine depart.

He didn't hear the Vulcan, either, as he quietly returned to check on the Doctor. Spock's eyes also lit on the creased-up paper. He knew McCoy would not wish him to read it, but he could see no logical alternative if he wished to help his friend. With some diffidence, since he had no wish to interfere with the Doctor's privacy, he read the words. His non-existent heart bled for the Doctor's loss, but the pain did not show on his face.

If it had been Jim, he would have eased the Captain into a deeper sleep without hesitation. But McCoy was right. There were times Spock forgot that Jim was not the only one who cared. The Doctor's friendship, like his own, lay deeply hidden, and neither of them had ever admitted it openly. Spock's telepathic ability assured him it was there. Jim had taught him almost everything he knew about friendship, since he had never had a friend before meeting the Captain. But the Doctor had taught him also. Sometimes friendship could be shown in strange ways. Sometimes even through anger. Humans were strange creatures!

It was perhaps because they were so alike in hiding their inner thoughts that McCoy understood him so well, and could use that knowledge to needle him so effectively. As a Vulcan he could not show he cared, for open emotions were scorned by his people. As a Doctor McCoy could not afford to show he cared either, because anything less than professionalism was frowned on by his people. So while Spock hid behind a face of stone that few could read, McCoy hid behind a professional mask that few could penetrate. They both had a single weakness - Jim Kirk. No, Spock reflected, they both had two weaknesses - Jim Kirk and each other.

Spock understood when McCoy said it was better not to care as that way you didn't get hurt. He no longer believed it. Before Jim he had been completely alone. That had hurt, although no-one would have known it. Jim had broken through his barriers and reached those hidden feelings. Jim had taught him that the pain of caring was worth bearing. But McCoy had been right about one thing. Jim had given him his friendship selflessly, never asking anything of Spock in return. Always he accepted only what the Vulcan offered. But Spock had never offered words of friendship in return. He knew that Jim understood how he felt. But from his Human mother, he knew that knowing was not always enough for Humans. Sometimes they had to be told. He was grateful to McCoy for pointing this out to him. When the opportunity presented itself he would make amends and tell Jim just what he meant to him. He would explain it was his Vulcan pride that had prevented him from accepting Jim's offer of accompanying him on shore-leave, but that he appreciated the offer. Saying the words would be hard, but friendship involved giving as well as receiving. McCoy was making the same mistake, letting pride prevent him from accepting the help freely offered.

Spock wondered if he'd ever be able to tell McCoy he considered him a friend. He wasn't sure McCoy would believe him if he said the words. But as McCoy and his Human

anecdotes would have said, 'actions speak louder than words'. The Vulcan tucked the Doctor into bed and tidily placed his boots at the foot of the bed. After hesitating for a short moment laid a gentle hand on his sweat-covered forehead. "Sleep" he said softly. He waited until his words had taken effect and the Doctor moved from restlessness into a deep sleep. He did not touch the paper as he passed the table, but he carefully picked up all the broken glass and put it down the disposal chute.

Christine Chapel stared in amazement when she returned to tidy up the doctor's office. All the broken glass had gone and McCoy was sleeping peacefully. 'Perhaps he has a guardian angel' she thought to herself. Jim Kirk came immediately to mind. She wouldn't put it past the Captain. He seemed to know everything that went on aboard the Enterprise. She retired happily to her own bed, thankful that McCoy had good friends to pull him through.

Captain Kirk swore when he discovered that both Bones and Spock had beamed down for their respective shore-leaves before he'd woken up. McCoy had even beaten Spock to it according to Kyle's report. Last night he wouldn't have given odds on the Doctor waking up before noon. Now he'd have to wait for them both to return before he thrashed this out with them. He took his name off the shore-leave roster.

"Too much to do" he said to Mr. Leslie with a smile. But the smile never touched his eyes, and Leslie didn't look convinced.

He returned to his cabin to catch up on some paperwork, and read the report from Personnel. "Bones, you shouldn't have gone alone," he said softly. He considered following him down, but it would be impossible to find one Human on a recreation planet full of Humans. He'd better tell Spock before the Vulcan spoke to the Doctor. He left a message with the transporter room to be alerted the minute Spock beamed back on board. He then drowned himself in paper, to avoid thinking too much.

McCoy had spent most of the morning trying to get himself drunk, but last night's mood had left him. Instead he wandered from bar to bar, ordering a drink, sipping a few mouthfuls, paying and moving on. He remembered vaguely what had happened and wondered how he was going to apologise to Jim and to Spock.

His mind was still on this when he heard raised voices. He couldn't make out what they were shouting and out of a detached sense of curiosity followed the sound down an alleyway. As he got closer he could hear the words. They reminded him of his own words of the previous night. Although said in plain Standard the words were very much anti-Vulcan.

As McCoy approached someone shouted a warning. Then he clearly heard a response. "It's okay. It's Doctor McCoy. He's on our side."

"What's going on here?" asked McCoy, aware that a headache was building with all the shouting.

"Good afternoon, Doctor" said a polite voice. McCoy recognised it after a minute.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Norton. You haven't answered my question."

"We were just expounding the differences between Humans and Vulcans, Doctor. I

believe you're an expert on the subject."

McCoy grunted.

"Wasn't it you who said that Vulcans were just walking computers?"

"Yes," answered McCoy shortly. "I also said some Humans are thick-headed, but I don't get quoted on that."

Norton laughed. "No, sir. But you do believe there are a great many differences between Vulcans and Humans."

McCoy nodded. "I sure do. Apart from the physical differences, like heart on the wrong side, colour and make-up of blood, control of body functions well lots of physical differences, there are psychological ones too. Vulcans rely a lot on their minds. Humans tend to rely on their emotions and unfortunately Vulcans don't seem to have or understand emotions too well."

"I told you," said Bremmer, breaking into the conversation. "You'll do, Doc. You're on our side."

"What's all this about sides?"

"I mean you don't like Vulcans much either."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"We've been looking at the differences between Vulcans and Humans, and decided that Vulcans have a lot to learn."

"About what?" queried McCoy.

"About feelings in particular," returned Bremmer. "You said Vulcans are just walking computers. Printed circuits. They have no heart."

"Of course they have a heart, but as I've said before it has a purely physical function," stated McCoy emphatically. Then looking at the crowded cellar he added, "But what's that got to do with you?"

"After this Romulan incident we've decided Starships would be better off without Vulcans."

"But the connection between Vulcans and Romulans is historic only. It's like saying, oh I don't know, saying we're Latin just because we have common roots. The Vulcans are peaceful and the Romulans warlike. Besides, I don't see what that's got to do with feelings."

"Starships are communities in space. We've been thinking they'd be better place to live if everyone had feelings and could contribute to the community."

"Now hold on a minute. Vulcans may be pig-headed, computerised, green-blooded and pointy-eared, but that sure as hell doesn't mean they don't contribute. Take Spock. There are times we'd have lost the ship without him. Even this latest Romulan incident. If he hadn't fired those phasers we'd all be dead."

"That's as may be, Doctor, but if we hadn't all been looking for spies perhaps we'd have spotted the coolant leak in the first place. As a psychologist you must agree that it is best to have people with feelings in charge of people with feelings. How can a computer take charge of sentient beings?"

"Vulcans are sentient."

"Sentient, perhaps, but not feeling. There is a difference."

"I don't know where this conversation is leading, but I don't like it," stated McCoy emphatically.

"We've decided that Mr Spock should leave the Enterprise."

"Well I'm sure Captain Kirk will be delighted to hear the Enterprise has turned into a democracy."

"We're not kidding, Doctor. We're not asking the Captain. We're telling Mr Spock."

McCoy felt a shiver go down his spine.

"I don't think he'll agree with you, gentlemen."

"You are correct, Doctor."

"Spock!" McCoy whirled towards the voice, coming from below him. He looked down the concrete steps to the room below, and noticed for the first time that it was crowded with Enterprise personnel, around 12 in number.

The Vulcan was at the back of the room, leaning quietly against the wall. The group of Humans parted giving McCoy a good look at him. He was wearing a Vulcan desert suit and not his usual blue shirt and black trousers. His hands were, as usual, behind his back.

"I didn't think you'd want to leave the Enterprise," said McCoy, only half-joking.

He turned to Norton and Bremmer. "I think you'd better get out of here and forget about persuading Mr Spock to leave. A Vulcan trait I've also expounded on frequently is stubbornness. Mr Spock has his full share of that."

Norton licked his lips. Bremmer pulled at his arm. "You're not going to let one man change things, Steve, are you?"

"He's an officer. Besides, I don't want to go on report with the Captain. There's always tomorrow."

They took the hint, and suddenly McCoy was being pushed and shoved as the cellar spewed its occupants out into the alleyway.

McCoy let them go and then descended the steps. It was a lot darker down here, although there was sufficient light to see. It was also cold.

"I don't suppose they had too many logical arguments for your leaving?" suggested McCoy.

"No".

"I didn't think so. I'm surprised they thought they'd be able to persuade you. In fact I can't understand why they'd want you to go at all." The Doctor coughed with embarrassment. "I guess what with last night and now this, you probably won't believe me, but I wouldn't want you to go."

"Indeed".

McCoy coughed again. "I won't pretend I didn't mean any of what I said. I've told you often enough. But I'm not a coward. I tell you what I think to your face, not to your back."

"I appreciate that."

"You're not trying to be sarcastic, are you?"

"No".

"Good. Then I'd like to apologise."

An eyebrow was raised. "You do not owe me an apology, Doctor."

"Yes, I do. For last night. You see, Jim was right. I'd had far too much to drink. He and you just got it because I was upset and drunk. The cause is not important. You just happened to be the nearest targets I could hit out at."

"Perhaps if you were to exercise Vulcan restraint at such times?" The words were soft. McCoy could have sworn Spock was smiling, but this seemed such an incongruous time and place and it was too dark to be sure. He raised his own eyebrow in a fair imitation of the Vulcan's form of query. Spock took the hint.

"I read the Stargram."

"Damn you, Spock. You had no right. It was private."

The Vulcan nodded in acknowledgement. "I am sorry. I knew you would not wish me to read it. You will perhaps wish to take it out on me? I shall not resist."

McCoy ignored the strange comment. "That's what I'd expect from you, Spock. You're just plain nosy. I've always said curiosity will be your downfall." Then after a moment, "I don't remember you reading the paper."

Spock shifted uncomfortably under the Doctor's gaze. "I returned to your cabin. You were asleep."

"You what?"

"I returned to your cabin."

"What for, for goodness sake?"

A green flush spread up the Vulcan's face, and he was grateful for the semi-darkness. "It is not important."

McCoy suddenly had a very clear idea of why Spock had returned. He remembered finding himself tucked up in bed with his boots neatly laid on the floor. He remembered the

lack of broken glass. He also remembered a very deep sleep. A curative, refreshing sleep.

"You old fraud, Spock." There was pure affection in the Doctor's voice. "You put me to bed."

"You were already in bed when I returned, Doctor. I tidied the room ..."

"I see."

Silence fell heavily between them. McCoy was wondering just who had put him to bed. Spock was pondering how many Human customs he had transgressed and whether McCoy would accept his apology while there was still time. McCoy noticed the Vulcan's continued unease. He smiled, and Spock caught the reflected light on his teeth and wondered if he'd ever understand Humans.

"Thank you for coming back, Spock. I appreciate it."

An eyebrow was raised. "You are welcome, is, I believe, the correct response."

"I don't suppose you got to the wilderness area?"

"No."

McCoy decided it was time he held out the olive branch.

"If you like, I'll come camping with you?"

"No."

McCoy decided he had offended the Vulcan after all. He wasn't totally surprised.

"I don't blame you, Spock. I guess I've said some pretty horrible things. I didn't mean to insult you."

"I am not insulted."

McCoy wasn't convinced and said sarcastically, "It was too much to expect you to admit to having feelings that could be ruffled."

"Indeed."

McCoy sighed. "Well, I think I'll go back to the ship, then."

"I also."

"What? You mean you'll go back to the ship? With me?"

"Yes."

"I wish you'd stop using one syllable answers. It's incredibly difficult having a conversation with you. Where's your communicator? I left mine on board so we'll have to use yours."

Spock didn't reply, but his eyes looked down towards the floor. McCoy followed the

invisible trail and stared in horror as his eyes lighted on the Vulcan's communicator. It was hardly recognisable as a communicator at all. There was no chance of its being active, but McCoy moved across to it and picked it up nonetheless. His fingers came away sticky and green.

"What happened?" he asked Spock quietly, automatically moving into his doctor/patient tone of voice.

"They did not wish me to contact the Enterprise."

"And?"

"I was still holding the communicator when they destroyed it."

"Let me look at your hand."

The Vulcan carefully withdrew his right hand from behind his back. It was immediately clear to McCoy that it was broken at wrist and middle finger. There was a lot of blood and pieces of communicator could clearly be seen embedded in Spock's palm. McCoy produced his medikit out of nowhere and treated the wound as best he could with his limited emergency supplies.

"Well, we'll just have to do it the hard way. Shanks's pony."

The inevitable eyebrow was raised.

"I mean we'll have to walk."

McCoy was still laughing as he made his way to the stairs. It was only when he got there that he realised Spock had not followed. He didn't know what intuition led him then, but he got a clear replay of Spock's voice in his mind saying, 'You will perhaps wish to take it out on me? I shall not resist'.

He turned back to the Vulcan. "Spock, what did you mean when you said I might wish to take it out on you?"

"Is it not a Human saying?"

"Yes. But there are lots of different meanings."

"I see."

"Well?"

"Well what, Doctor?"

"What did you mean?"

"You might wish to hit me."

"Spock! What on Earth gave you that idea?"

Before he said anything else McCoy had his mediscanner out and had run it over the unprotesting Vulcan. He repeated the movement, finding it hard to believe the results.

"Do you mean to say you've just been standing there conversing with me while you're slowly bleeding to death? You must be crazy. Why didn't you tell me?"

Spock did not reply. McCoy groaned. "You really thought I'd hit you, didn't you, Spock? I can't believe it."

"On the contrary, Doctor. It is because I knew you would be reluctant to take such action that I did not wish to discourage you from hitting me. That is what is required in the circumstances."

"Required. Since when has hitting someone been required? What's got into you?"

"I understood from my recent ... conversation ... that to take it out on someone was part of the Human concept of apology. You were entitled to an apology for my reading your Stargram. I did not think you would accept my apology if you realised my condition and I did not wish to ... that is ... I was unsure if there would be time for an apology later. It was important to me."

"Have you ever seen Jim or me hit each other, Spock?"

"No."

"Then you were being totally illogical."

"There is no need for you to insult me, Doctor. I have never seen you or Jim apologise to each other. Mr. Bremmer was quite clear on the subject."

"There are times you are amazingly naive, Spock. You shouldn't believe everything you hear. He lied."

"Indeed. I have yet to assimilate the Human penchant for lying."

"Now you're being insulting."

"That was not my intention."

"That makes a change. Anyway, I'd better go and get you some help while you're still functioning. Will you be okay while I'm gone?"

"Yes." And seeing McCoy's exasperation, "I will."

McCoy smiled, despite the situation. He never could be certain if Spock had a sense of humour. Jim assured him he did. But if he did, McCoy only saw it at the weirdest times. He shook his head. As he came back into the sunshine and looked around, his eyes caught the reflection of light against metal. He was about to leave the alley when it dawned on him just what that movement meant. In a second he'd turned around and raced back to the stairs. He was just in time. The figures who had emerged from behind their various hiding places disappeared again.

The Doctor swore heatedly, adding, "I'd best get my feelings out of the way out here 'cos Spock's sure not going to appreciate them."

He descended the steps and caught the Vulcan's eyes on him.

"We're going to have to make it on foot, Spock. They're waiting up there. If I go for help they'll be back before I can say boo."

"Why would you wish to say boo?"

"Just shut up and start walking."

"Regrettably I cannot comply."

McCoy was not really surprised. It just seemed ludicrous that Spock and he could stand here and have a quiet, controlled conversation while the man was practically bleeding to death. The trouble was McCoy had absolutely nothing to help him. Oh, he'd got the pieces of communicator out of Spock's palm and given him a broad spectrum anti-biotic and a painkiller, despite Spock's mild protest, but he had nothing for the kind of injuries Spock had sustained. He couldn't stop internal bleeding. Even the painkillers were for minor injuries, not for a complete working over.

"Could you walk if I helped you?"

Spock hesitated. If the truth were known he'd prefer to just lie down where he was and let them get it over with.

McCoy misinterpreted his hesitation.

"I know I'm not Jim, Spock, but surely you can unbend your Vulcan principles enough to lean on me. It's got to be the logical answer."

Spock nodded, unsure of how to respond. He didn't think McCoy would believe him if he told him the truth.

McCoy came over to him and gently put the Vulcan's left arm over his shoulder. He was expecting resistance and was surprised when he didn't get it. When he put his own arm across Spock's back to lend further support he felt the Vulcan draw away from him and stiffen.

"I'm only trying to help, dammit. I can't do that if you won't let me."

Spock did not relax. McCoy swore out loud. Then a weak voice replied.

"If you would move your arm down three inches."

McCoy realised what had happened. He'd put his arm across an injury. No wonder Spock had stiffened away from him. McCoy complied with Spock's request and felt him relax immediately.

"Blast your Vulcan pride, Spock. If you'd just yelled I'd have moved my arm soon enough."

There was no reply. They made their way silently across the room, making good progress until they reached the base of the stairs. Spock took in the thirty-two steps and his heart sank. He wondered if he should just sit down. But McCoy was egging him on.

"Okay, Spock. One step at a time. You know the Chinese saying. Every journey starts with a single step." McCoy chatted away, trying to take his own and Spock's minds off the journey. Spock was sweating before they reached the third step, and McCoy was more



Martin Street 92

concerned than he cared to admit. McCoy started sweating too, as Spock leaned more and more heavily on him. Doggedly they pressed on, one foot in front of the other, a real effort to drag the lower foot up to match, and then on to the next step. Spock was panting heavily when they made the top step and McCoy decided they both needed a rest. He positioned Spock carefully against the wall and disentangled his arm. The Vulcan immediately started slipping down the wall, and McCoy was forced to steady him until he somehow maintained his own equilibrium.

The mediscanner whirred again, but the Vulcan was in no condition to protest. McCoy had only one Vulcan painkiller left. He hadn't come equipped for anything more than an unfortunate accident. It was only his lifelong medical experience that had made him bring the scanner and small medikit on shore-leave with him at all. He explained the situation to Spock and asked if the Vulcan could manage a bit longer. He got a short nod in reply.

They restarted their journey. It was easier on the flat, but Spock's condition was deteriorating rapidly.

"Only 300 yards to the communication booth," said McCoy encouragingly. "They'll be able to beam us up from there."

Spock did not have breath to reply, but he responded by lessening his dependence on the Doctor. It did not last. They had travelled only 100 yards when the Vulcan was forced to stop and rest.

They'd made another 100 yards when Spock's still sensitive hearing picked out the sound of people approaching.

"Doctor, they will not allow us to reach the booth. You must leave me and save yourself."

"What are you talking about, Spock? It's only another 100 yards."

"They also are aware of that."

McCoy's own ears picked out the sound of people approaching.

"Do you have your phaser?"

The black head shook in negation.

"Neither do I. I've got my medikit, though."

"I do not think that will deter them, Doctor."

"We'll see about that." McCoy rummaged through the few items and produced a hypo and a scalpel. He yelled out, "The first one who comes near us gets this - and I don't mind telling you he'll die slowly and painfully." He winked at an unbelieving Spock. "I've got plenty to go round, so come and get it! Keep moving, Spock," he urged the Vulcan.

"Leave me, as you should have left me at the cellar."

"What happened to your Vulcan pride, Spock? Walk, dammit."

And amazingly Spock responded and started walking. McCoy stayed at his shoulder,

but he couldn't support his weight and watch them as well. They made another 25 yards when someone was brave enough to approach. It was Bremmer.

"I wouldn't do it if I were you!" shouted McCoy, fear lending strength to his voice.

Bremmer ignored him. McCoy fired the needle from his hypo like a dart and it embedded itself in Bremmer's right arm. For two shocked seconds no-one moved, then Bremmer was screaming, and fell to the ground.

"Run" shouted McCoy. Spock attempted to comply but managed little more than a shuffle. He was still on his feet, to McCoy's amazement.

Spock's curiosity won out even over his pain.

"What did you give him?"

McCoy laughed. "Vulcan painkiller, Spock. It likes the Human system about as much as they seem to like you. That's why you get an upset stomach when I give it to you. If you had no Human elements in your blood you wouldn't get a reaction.

They struggled on. McCoy thought they were going to make it when a sudden rush of people made it impossible for him to do anything. He let go of Spock completely. The Vulcan swayed alarmingly, but managed to stay on his feet. McCoy turned to face the impossible odds, when there was the sound of phaser fire.

"What's going on here?"

"Thank God!" said McCoy. "Come on, Spock. The cavalry has arrived."

Stiles stood by the communications booth, phaser drawn and eyes very puzzled.

Norton shouted to him. "You should be on our side, Stiles. You're the one that doesn't like Romulans."

"But Spock isn't a Romulan."

"Romulans, Vulcans, what's the difference. You were keen to get rid of him when you thought he was one of them. He looks just like them. Just beam back up and forget what you saw."

Stiles shook his head. "I learned my lesson the hard way, Norton. Spock risked his neck to save mine. I'm not about to leave him to the likes of you. Why don't you just forget the whole thing. I was wrong, and so are you."

Norton came forward. Others followed.

"If you're not with us, you're against us!" he shouted.

"I'm against you, sure enough!" yelled Stiles.

McCoy realised he was buying them time. He'd urged Spock forward again when Stiles' phaser opened fire, on heavy stun. McCoy never knew how he and Spock made it without being hit, but make it they did. It was Stiles who yelled "Emergency, three to beam up!" and Stiles who caught the edge of a phaser set to kill.

Mr. Leslie took one look and called for a medical team. Then, realising Spock was one of the returning crewmen, and remembering the Captain's standing orders, he called Kirk.

Spock heard Kirk's voice and immediately straightened away from McCoy's helping hand. "I do not wish him to see me like this," he whispered to McCoy. The Doctor nodded in understanding.

"Out of my way, Jim," blustered McCoy. "I've got a sick person to get to Sickbay and you're holding things up. Whatever you've got to say can wait until I'm finished."

Kirk was left staring as his medical staff wheeled Stiles away, with Spock surreptitiously supported by McCoy himself following close behind.

"What happened?" he asked Leslie.

"Search me, sir. They looked to be in quite a mess though."

"Bones probably had too much to drink ... and not without reason," mused an unsuspecting Kirk. "It looked to me like Spock was supporting him there."

"I think it was more like the other way," muttered Leslie.

"Pardon?" queried Kirk, not sure he had heard right.

"Nothing, sir. Doctor McCoy did say he intended visiting every bar in town."

Kirk decided he'd give Bones sufficient time to get himself sorted out.

The Captain walked into Sickbay two hours later to find Spock in intensive care, having successfully emerged from a major operation, McCoy a patient in his own ward, suffering from a wrenched shoulder, and Stiles in bed with a badly injured leg.

Bewildered, he asked of no-one in particular, "What happened?"

Dr. M'Benga stepped forward. "I have not had a full report, Captain, but it is clear from the injuries that Mr. Spock has been attacked and seriously injured, probably by a gang of some kind. McCoy appears to have rescued him, and wrenched his shoulder in the process, which is why he is under heavy sedation. Stiles is suffering from a phaser burn. And, Captain, the phaser was set to kill."

"What?"

"I am positive Stiles' injuries are associated with a phaser set to kill."

James Kirk was on to Shore Security within seconds. He was astounded to hear their response that the Enterprise crew were the only ones with phasers on the planet.

"Something's going on down there," he muttered. "Dr. M'Benga, can any of them be brought round without danger?"

The Doctor sighed. "For McCoy it will be painful, but not life-threatening."

"Do it."

McCoy was still drowsy when he came round.

"Bones, what happened?"

"It's a long storrrry" he mumbled, slurring his words.

"Bones. I need to know what happened. Someone's down there with a phaser set to kill."

"They want to kill Spock."

"Who wants to kill him?"

"The crew."

"Bones, you're not making sense. Who wants to kill Spock?"

"Some of the crew. Norton's the leader. And Bremmer. They don't like Vulcans."

"And Stiles?"

"He saved us. If it wasn't for him we'd both be dead."

James Kirk had a Security detail organised within minutes. They went down and rounded up Norton, and before long had the whole gang. Gang it was. They hadn't been hard to find, as they'd turned on each other. Three people had already been killed, one of them an innocent bystander.

It was a week later when Spock was let out of intensive care. Bones was fussing over him when Kirk entered. Stiles had been released so there were just the three of them. Christine Chapel was on duty, but she took the hint and disappeared at a slight nod from McCoy. It was the first time any of them had had a chance to talk.

Kirk opened the conversation.

"I am truly sorry about the divorce, Bones. I should have realised something was wrong."

"So it was you!"

"Pardon."

"You read my Stargram and put me to bed".

"Not guilty, Bones. I got official notification from Starfleet, and I've no idea who put you to bed. Spock?"

"As I have already advised Doctor McCoy, Captain, I did not put him to bed."

"No?" queried McCoy, still unsure.

"But you know who did," Kirk hazarded a guess.

Spock's silence confirmed this. McCoy glared at him, but the look glanced off a stone wall.

"I guess I owe you an apology for that night, Jim. I didn't mean to take it out on you."

"That's what friends are for, Bones. No apology needed."

"I owe you an apology too, Spock."

"We have been through that, Doctor."

"You'll have to get Spock to tell you what he thought was involved in a Human apology, Jim. You'll never believe it. Sometimes he gets the craziest ideas."

The Vulcan's eyes couldn't meet Jim's as the Captain turned to him in query. Kirk caught the quickly veiled inner pain in them.

What is it, Spock?" he asked gently.

"I'm sorry," said McCoy contritely. "Me and my big mouth. Forget it, Jim. Someone told him a lie and he believed it. I've put him straight since then. I am sorry it was such a painful experience. I told you that's what you get for caring."

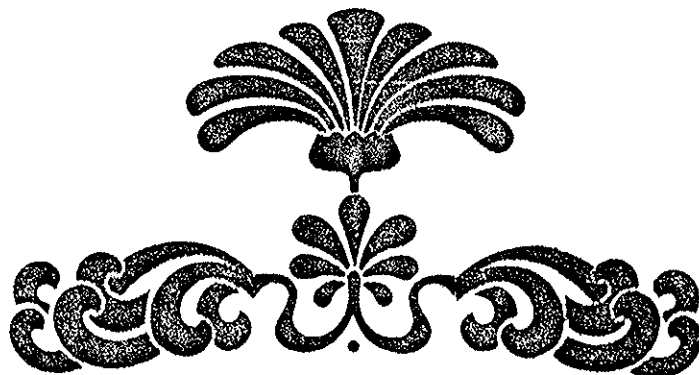
The brown eyes looked up and held his. "I have gained far more than I lost, Doctor."

His eyes moved on, and held Kirk's. "I have learned another lesson, Captain. It is as important in friendship to be able to accept help as to give it. It is a difficult concept ... for a Vulcan. I should have accepted your offer to accompany you camping."

McCoy cleared his throat noisily. "I guess it's not just Vulcans that find that a difficult concept. I knew you were trying to help the night I got the Stargram, Jim, but I guess I wasn't ready to accept that help then either. It's hard to admit you need help sometimes; usually when you need it most."

There was an amicable silence, while they all reflected on the truth of this. "You know, Spock, there's another Human saying that fits the bill. 'A trouble shared is a trouble halved'."

For once he got no argument from either of his friends.

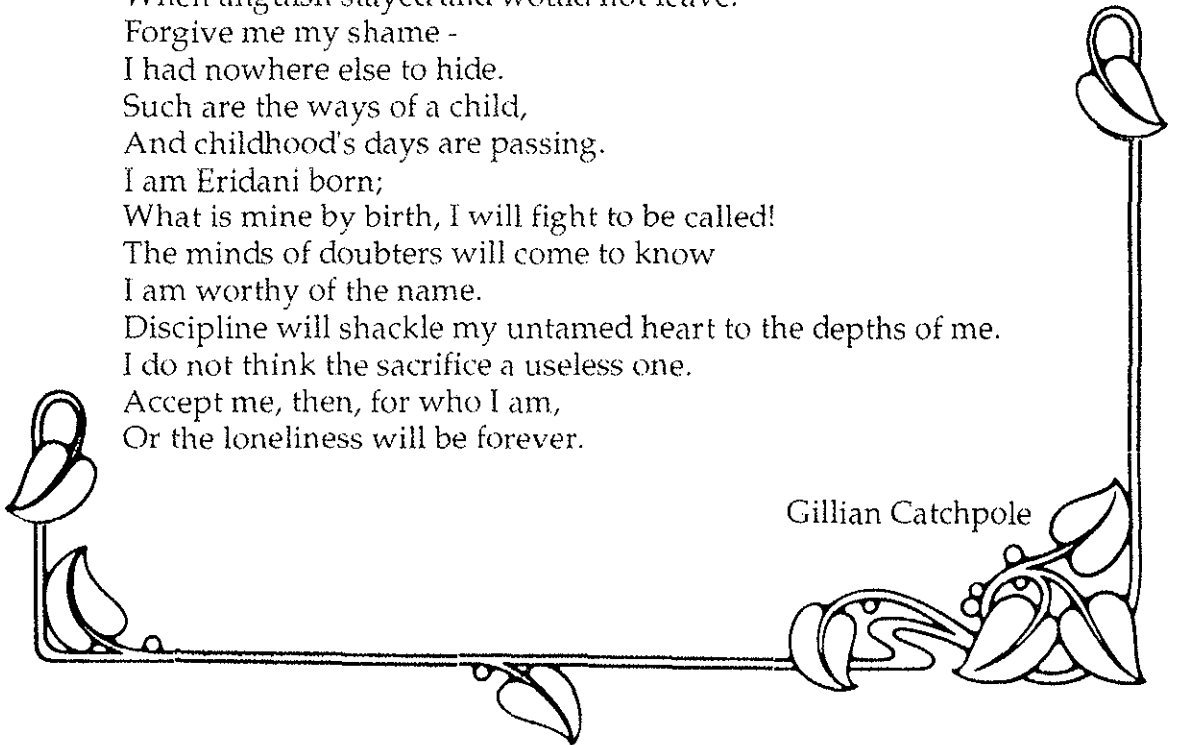


ERIDANI BORN

Born from the craggy mountain peaks
 Where, rising from their nesting ledges,
 The giant S'lukae dip and soar,
 The spread of their wings tipped in flame
 To greet the dawn.
 Scorched by its suns the land is harsh.
 Land from the ancient eras,
 The rocky plateau, sculptured pillars,
 The eroded wind-swept heights, stunning in their severity.
 Desert winds are the breath in my lungs.
 Flowing through my veins
 The Sacred Waters, sustenance of life,
 Symbol of acceptance, of our place in creation,
 Passed down to us from the Time of the Beginning.
 And when the storm clouds gather and the rain sweeps down
 All life is refreshed and is awakened;
 The deserts burst into ephemeral colour.
 Though the ground is parched, it can wait for water.
 Adapt to the challenge, be strong and then flourish.
 From these burning, arid sands have I been born.

Enclosed in walls of umber stone
 There is a place, a sanctuary,
 Secluded, with shades of green and dappled light
 Where petals of V'ashta-li succulents
 Begin to close at even-tide, their fragrance pervading the air.
 A world within.
 I sought its foliage and cooling paths
 When anguish stayed and would not leave.
 Forgive me my shame -
 I had nowhere else to hide.
 Such are the ways of a child,
 And childhood's days are passing.
 I am Eridani born;
 What is mine by birth, I will fight to be called!
 The minds of doubters will come to know
 I am worthy of the name.
 Discipline will shackle my untamed heart to the depths of me.
 I do not think the sacrifice a useless one.
 Accept me, then, for who I am,
 Or the loneliness will be forever.

Gillian Catchpole



ARENA OF COMBAT

by

Gloria Fry

I materialised on a desolate, mountainous region of an unknown planet, perfectly suitable for me under ordinary circumstances; but my situation was far from normal. My ship had been neutralised, forced to hang suspended in space, controlled by the Metrons, an alien race of immense power who had seized me, transported me here to engage in personal combat with an alien Captain of the species known as Human, from the planet Earth.

As I sensed the alien presence I turned and stared at it in horror. Ugly - just like the invaders who had inhabited Cestus; biped with round shell-like ears, strange fur upon its head, tiny eyes and nose, small ineffective teeth. It wore odd garments which covered most of its puny body, but the skin of its face and hands was smooth and pale like a corpse.

Disgusting...

It started back in fear as I took a step forward. Obviously it was terrified by the majesty of a Warrior-Captain of the Gorn Fleet. I laughed to myself. This was a Starship Captain? This... weak creature! I would conquer this feeble specimen easily.

I pulled a branch off a nearby tree and advanced on the Earther. It ran away, tried to mimic my action but was only capable of breaking off a tiny stick from another tree. I allowed myself a moment of pride at my physical prowess, and revulsion overcame me for my small opponent.

Weakling...

We fought, but through luck it touched me on the delicate sensors of my auditory canals, temporarily blinding me with pain. In that moment it escaped, using its one advantage over me - its fleetness of foot - and scurried up to a vantage point above me. Fearfully it searched around, finally picking up a small rock which it held between its clumsy little hands. With much difficulty it raised the stone above its head, sweating with the effort of holding even such a minor weight, and I stood there laughing, sure that it would collapse with the strain. To my amazement it somehow managed to throw the rock at me, catching me a glancing blow upon my chest. How had that feeble strength managed such a feat? Angered, determined to show my physical superiority, I lifted up a large boulder and hurled it at the stunned Human, but it missed as the puny being roused itself to leap to one side, then run away.

Coward...

My ingenuity and supremacy will tell eventually, my reasoning told me. I carefully planned my campaign, then began to set traps to capture the Human, and to make a dagger to kill it. As I worked I listened to the detailed recordings it made, laughing as I noted how it foolishly forgot I could hear. Another sign of its inferiority, I reassured myself.

I underestimated the creature though, almost to my undoing, as it somehow scaled the heights above me and sent a large stone cascading down to hit me full on the chest. The boulder loomed above me before I was able to step aside out of its path and its crushing weight knocked the breath from me as it pinned me to the ground.

Barely retaining consciousness, I forced my hurt body to move, finally managing to release myself a little just before the Human could reach me. I smelled the horror and fear as it saw me still alive and in blind terror the Earther fled. I staggered to my feet, forced the pain away and followed, deep anger within my heart at the humiliation. It was heading for one of the traps. I would kill it - yes. But... first... I would torture the monster.

Determinedly I continued, and as I emerged from the pathway my blood sang with joy at the sight before my eyes. The Human lay amongst the rocks, twisting helplessly in my makeshift trap. It was there - my prey. My victim. I could smell the animal's fear as I approached; my head spun in delightful anticipation. I would take the warm blood as my primitive ancestors had done with their prisoners. I would drink its soul...

Ecstasy...

I leaned forward, my dagger raised for the kill, but to my horror the nimble athleticism of the Human robbed me of my rights and it escaped as I moved the entrapping boulder aside. A haze of fury almost blinded me as I staggered after it, but finally reason prevailed. I would never capture the creature this way. Control was all; I must not succumb to blind rage.

Activating the translator/recording device the Metrons had supplied I contacted my prey, telling it to wait for me, promising that its death would be merciful and quick. But it would not yield - its will to survive matched my own.

Like some ancient warrior, I stalked the Human who had ignored my generous offer of clemency. Now it would pay the price. Now the stubborn alien would know the force of Gorn bloodlust. It would plead and beg abjectly for its miserable life, but there would be only agony now as I punished it for daring to harm a prince of Gorn.

Victory...

I tracked the creature; it was injured and that would slow it down. Soon I gained on it and heard the frantic breathing close by; in a few short moments its life would be in my hands. Confidently I moved towards the welcome sounds of my enemy's fear. In a few short seconds its life would be mine.

At last I spotted it, beaten, kneeling upon the ground, crouched over exhausted, and readied myself for the kill. Then my ship would be free, the Humans would be dead; Cestus would be ours again.

Suddenly the Human turned. In a blur of motion and deafening sound, something rammed into my chest with sickening force. The pain shot through me in unbearable waves and I sank trembling to the ground. Blinded, I lay helpless and vulnerable, sensing the Human kneeling over me, smelling the pungent sweat, hearing his quickened breathing. My own dagger was pressed into my neck, the sharp point ready to penetrate the perfection of my skin. Despair swept through me as I waited, unable to move, paralysed by the force the alien had unleashed upon me, beaten by this puny, deformed creature. Shame stole over me as I awaited death, misery at my failure to save my ship and crew. My life was at an end.

Conquered...

His shocking words fell upon my disbelieving ears.

"No, I won't kill you." His voice was gentle, full of compassion. "Maybe you thought you were protecting yourself when you attacked the outpost."

The dagger tip no longer threatened me. The Human left my side. I could not understand. What was happening?

"No, I won't kill him!" he defied the Metrons. "Do you hear? You'll have to get your entertainment someplace else!"

Amazed and confused by his behaviour, I struggled to speak. Why? *Why* was he sparing me? He had beaten me. I had been helpless, unable to protect myself. Why had he not killed me? A tiny shred of hope appeared deep within me. Did it mean that Humans were not the monsters we believed them to be? Were they intelligent beings who perhaps...?

Before I could finish the revolutionary thought, the Metron transporter beam took me and a moment later I was deposited on the Bridge of my ship. My crew stared in astonishment.

"Zlar!" my life-mate cried, her welcome voice washing over me like a balm. "We thought you dead!" she whispered, her sweet voice filled with love.

I lifted my arms, studied my uninjured body, perplexed by these new developments. My mind in a daze, I stared up at my beloved, drinking in her beauty. I had thought never to see her again.

"He spared me," I said into the shocked silence. "He would not kill me."

They could not understand, as I could not, why a member of such a savage brutal species would show mercy.

"Captain," my Navigator said, "we have been returned to our own domain. We are orbiting the home-world."

I turned to face the viewscreen. The Metrons, those mysterious all-powerful beings, had done this. But why? They had warned that the loser and his ship would be destroyed.

My thoughts returned to the Human. Small, repulsive in looks, feeble in body, but... resourceful, agile, intelligent... and merciful. Without doubt, I knew that we were alive due to his intervention.

"Perhaps," I mused, expanding on my earlier thought, "the Humans did not know the planet was ours. It is - after all - at the farthest reaches of our domain. Would it be possible - I wonder - to negotiate with them?"

My life-mate moved to my side. "Is it possible?" she asked wonderingly.

I considered the Human and his brave, determined battle against a larger, more powerful being. He had been very afraid, but a coward? No. He had been courageous; a worthy opponent.

Warrior...

Perhaps - with such a warrior - I could talk.



FEAR

(Carle - a poem found by Detective Shaw: Murder on the Enterprise.)

I fear, I fail, both in my work and life.
 I can't get it right, it just won't be right.
 I can't even control my fear.
 Spock's tried, but he's Vulcan and can't
 Understand - not even his Human half.
 I destroy things. Maybe it's my nature.
 Take Uhura and her affair with him.
 I fouled it up.
 And Dr. Chapel - she hates my guts.
 I get her mad for... my sake?
 But it's her hate that drives me on.
 Write - so Dr. McCoy says
 - it clears your system.
 Well, it don't help mine.
 I'm still the same.

Susan Keighley



GUILT

(From Uhura's notes, found by Detective Shaw: Murder on the Enterprise.)

He's guilty now - towards her, towards me.
 It wasn't fair, really, to have expected him to cope,
 But the sugar tried.
 And if in the failing all has crumbled
 He has at least that to be proud of.
 Poor Spock. Poor honey. Not even Jim could
 Save him from hurting me, nor her.
 Yet unlike Carle my pain's not fatal.

Susan Keighley



FEVER

by

Maggie Symon

He tossed and fought to turn over in the restless sleep, but something held him fast. His arms were pinned to his sides. His legs refused to move.

Hot, damp hair stuck to his face and neck.

From far away he heard voices, strange voices, talking in a language that was familiar but not his own.

He couldn't decipher what was said, but the babble grew louder and louder. He wanted to raise his hands to cover his ears, to blot out the sounds, but his arms stayed firmly at his sides. All he could do was toss his head from side to side in a useless attempt to silence the sound that crashed louder and louder against his ear drums.

Suddenly he thought he could see a riot of colour appear at the corner of his eye.

He turned his head in that direction... Blue and gold, two splashes of colour so bright he had to squint his eyes.

The shapes drew nearer. Blue was over him.

The voices again, louder, more distinct.

He yelled at the top of his voice for help, but all he got in return was a tingling sensation in the top of his left arm; blackness swept in from the edges of his vision, enveloping everything.

Cold, ice cold!

What was the noise that had woken him?

He listened.

The noise came from him. It was his teeth rattling together, chattering with cold. He had never felt so cold. The chill reached to his bones. He tried to open his eyes, but all was darkness.

Where was he now?

A blanket was tucked around him, tucked tight right up to his chin, but the terrible cold continued.

Then he knew where he was - Beta Niobe. That would explain the coldness. Zarabeth was there. It must have been she who had wrapped the blanket about him.

He called her name, louder and louder.

The Vulcan words sounded strange with the shaky chatter of his teeth.

Why didn't she come? Surely she couldn't be far?

He called again. A hand, warm, held his. But he was still so very cold.

The weight of the blanket only made breathing seem hard. He gasped for air. The blackness changed to purple, then red. Lights flashed before his unseeing eyes.

He was frightened. He clutched the hand tighter. He thought he could hear a woman's cry of pain. Other strong fingers seemed to pry their hands apart.

Zarabeth... where are you?

But there was no sound from his lips; it was his mind that screamed the words, and no-one answered. Silence, peace! But not for long. Soon the tossing restlessness that refused to let him sleep returned.

The place seemed to be on fire. Heat, hotter than he had ever known. Perhaps he was home.

This must be Vulcan.

Red danced before his eyes. Yes, Vulcan! The beauty of Mount Seleya? The Forge, that was it! He was in The Forge with its dry, biting dust. Red dust; that was why his eyes hurt.

Where was I-chaya? Where was his faithful sehlat? Perhaps it had gone home to fetch his father.

Was this his Kahs-wan?

Perhaps that was why he felt so tired. How many days had he been here?

He couldn't remember.

The heat was intense. He called I-Chaya; he called for Sarek.

No-one answered.

He needed to drink; his lips kept sticking together. He licked them with a dry tongue.

Why didn't someone come? Surely he was dying, out here in the desert with no-one to take his katra...

He was aware again of the tingling feeling in his upper arm. A cool hand lay across his forehead; he calmed down and heard a voice, clear and crisp.

"Nurse Chapel, how is he?"

What did it mean? Before he could give any more thought to it, the blackness came again, swallowing all before it.

A pounding in his head... An ache that refused to go away spread across his neck and shoulders. The pounding grew louder and louder, like a giant heartbeat. The pain was so

intense he screamed and screamed.

Somewhere there was the blackness, somewhere there was peace.

Lights danced before his eyes. A new noise took over from the pounding, but the pain continued.

He felt himself slipping; falling, falling, but instead of the welcoming blackness, colours, bright, so bright he crunched his eyes tight shut to try to stop them. The lights were unbearable.

A rushing sound filled his ears and all the time he was falling, falling.

His arms pulled against whatever held them, thrashing, and all the time he tried to grab something, *anything*, to halt his fall.

He could hear his voice shout, "Mother, Mother!" in desperation.

He felt a cold hand hold his.

It must be his mother, Amanda; only his mother had hands that cold on Vulcan. Her Earth blood made it so. He knew she was there beside him. The falling sensation stopped. A queer fluttering in his stomach was all that remained.

A voice - a woman's voice - broke into his thoughts.

"Mr Spock, can you hear me?"

"Mother?"

"Mr Spock, please, if you can hear me, speak Standard. Do you understand?"

He didn't understand. What was Standard? His mother spoke Vulcan not too well but always to him when they were alone.

Perhaps if he spoke in Terran, but the words were locked deep in his memory...

The pounding returned with a vengeance. He tossed and turned, trying to kill the pain. Why didn't it stop? Hours seemed to pass before a fitful sleep gave him respite.

Wet. He felt wet.

His clothes lay damp against his skin. His eyes stung with tears when he tried to open them.

Where was he? Perhaps it was Earth - Earth, where it rained all the time?

He could hear the voices again. Terran voices. Someone was talking to him, but the words were all jumbled up. Strong arms pulled him into a sitting position and supported him there. He tried to hold his head up, but it kept sagging onto his chest.

He felt so weak. He knew that if the strong arms let go he would just crash backwards

again. He could see the arms dancing in front of his eyes. Gold material, with fancy golden braid around the cuffs, covered them, so familiar to him - but he couldn't remember...

His wet clothes were being removed. Warm air encased his damp body until it felt dry and warm.

Clean clothes were carefully slipped on and he was gently lowered back down again.

He began to feel dizzy. The ceiling came into focus and spun around and around. The light above his head seemed to glow bright and then fade, glow and fade... He watched it, fascinated. It reminded him of the moon on Ratchie IV.

He could still hear the voices and the movement around him, he felt so tired... He slept.

He opened his eyes to see Nurse Chapel gazing down at him.

He blinked.

She blushed, bright scarlet. Her hand held his. She pulled away and stuttered, "Oh, Mr Spock!"

He tried to sit up, but arm and leg restraints prevented him.

Doctor McCoy came into his field of vision. "Ah, so you've decided to wake up, have you?, OK, Nurse, we can do without the restraints now." McCoy peered into the dark Vulcan eyes. "Spock, you had us a bit worried for a while. How do you feel? And don't start gabbling in Vulcan again, no-one on board can understand it."

Spock, free of restraint, eased himself into a sitting position. "As you can see, Doctor, I am recovered. Now, if you will excuse me, I will return to duty immediately."

"Oh no you don't!"

"Pardon, Doctor?" An eyebrow rose.

"Do you think I'm going to let you waltz out of here after what you have put us through?"

"I have no intention of performing a dance, Dr McCoy."

"Listen here, Spock, don't play word games with me, I'm not in the mood. Jim, Nurse Chapel and I have spent hours with you, trying to beat that bug you picked up, and no way will I let you out of here minutes after you come round, undoing all that hard work we put in. No way!"

At that moment Captain Kirk arrived at Sickbay. "Spock! Thank God. Are you OK?"

Spock nearly smiled but controlled himself. "Captain, I can assure you, I am able to resume duty. Please, Jim."

Kirk could never resist Spock when he had that pleading tone to his voice. "Well... all right. Have a meal first and I'll arrange for you to do half shifts for a day or two until I'm sure

you are back to normal!"

McCoy exploded. "Jim! Really, I must protest... "

"Put it in writing, Bones. Spock, report to the bridge in an hour," and Kirk turned and left before McCoy could argue.

McCoy turned to Nurse Chapel. "OK, Nurse, discharge this patient and add on his medical record chip that it is against Doctor's advice!"

Spock's voice was soft, almost a whisper. "Thank you, Doctor, for your care."

McCoy knew it was as close as the Vulcan could get to showing affection. He too felt embarrassed.

"Get out of here, Spock! Make room for a *real* invalid."



REMEMBER WHEN THE STARS SHONE BRIGHTER

by

Patricia De Voss

The Enterprise had just left Starbase Ten after having dropped off Commodore Stocker and Dr Janet Wallace - and with some persuasion, one James T. Kirk for a bit of R & R. The Enterprise was due back that way in three days after they delivered some much-needed medical supplies to Vega.

It was while on the way that they ran into a freak storm. Sensors showed that it did not exist; yet the turbulence caused inside the ship was enough to convince everyone of the reality of the non-existent storm.

"Lt Hallo to Bridge."

"Spock here. What is the problem, Lieutenant?"

"Sir, I'm picking up a transporter signal. Should I try and bring whoever it is in or block it?"

"Try and hold the signal, I'll be right down. Security to the Transporter Room. Mr Sulu, you have the Con."

Lt Hallo was busy trying to hold the co-ordinates when Spock came through the door, followed only moments later by the Security team.

"Have you locked on?"

"I've been trying, sir. But it's this storm - one minute I have something, and the next, nothing."

"I always said that damn thing was dangerous," came a familiar voice from the background.

"Doctor, what are you doing here?"

"If someone is caught in that thing he is going to need my help. If you ever get him through."

Spock and Lt Hallo worked jointly and within minutes a form materialised onto the transporter pad. The person stood there for a moment, staring at the people around him; then collapsed before anyone could utter a word.

McCoy's first thought upon seeing the man was that the vaccine hadn't worked. Then, like Spock, he noticed the uniform. McCoy rushed his patient to Sickbay where a puzzled Chapel was just as eager to find out who he was. In his semi-conscious state he twisted and

turned and occasionally called out a name. Spock had been on the Bridge when McCoy's call had come through. Now he was in McCoy's office listening to the Doctor's report.

"According to all my readings that man in there really is Jim Kirk, aged 47. And this time it is not the result of any radiation sickness. The question is what do we do with him once he wakes up. We can't have two Captains."

"We will have to find a way to send him back to wherever he has come from."

"I wonder if he is still the Captain of the Enterprise!"

"As a matter of fact... I am. A somewhat different ship than now, but still the Enterprise," came the unexpected voice from behind them.

"Jim. Who said you could get out of bed?"

"I thought I was dreaming. Looks like I'm not. What stardate is it?"

"Three four seven eight point three. We are on route to Vega to deliver medical supplies."

Kirk looked over at his friend... his brother-to-be. So much lay ahead. Somehow Spock sensed his need and knew that at this point in time, he couldn't be the friend Kirk wanted.

"If you will excuse me, Captain, Doctor, I must return to the Bridge."

Kirk looked back to McCoy. "Am I... am I on board at present?"

"Your younger self is at present enjoying some R & R on Starbase Ten."

"Well, that's one good thing. Bones, if I remember rightly you always had a bottle hidden in here."

McCoy smiled and turned around to get the bottle. After downing the first glassful, McCoy handed Jim a clean uniform.

"I was going to bring this in later. But seeing you're here - "

Kirk looked down at the Command gold of the uniform. Then, as if handling a relic that was centuries old, he gently placed it down.

"No, thanks. I think I'll stay as I am." He drank the contents of the glass in one go and handed it back for a refill.

"What's the matter?"

"Why should anything be the matter? After all, aren't I James Kirk, Starfleet's wonder boy. Or at least I was then... *now*."

"I didn't think I'd ever see the day that you would give in."

"People change. The extra mileage tends to do that to a person. It all seemed so much easier from this end. You know, I'm glad my younger self isn't here or I might have been tempted to tell him to lock himself in his quarters and not come out."

"I don't think he would listen."

"There wasn't a lot I couldn't do... Do you know how many crew I've seen die?"

"Do you know how many patients? And I've been a Doctor a lot longer than you ever will be a ship's Captain. The only thing wrong with you is an overdose of self pity."

With that remark, a smile crept along Kirk's face, and for a short time McCoy thought that his friend had come back.

"I seem to remember you telling me the same thing only last week."

"Well it's good to know I'm consistent. By the way, who is David? You were calling for him in your sleep."

"He was a brilliant scientist. Another of those very talented young men who have the universe at their feet. He was brash and eager and like my younger self, there wasn't a thing he couldn't handle... except the wrong end of a Klingon knife." Kirk started to fidget with the glass he was holding as memories came rushing back. "And he was my son."

The intercom sounded, bringing any further conversation to a halt.

"Spock to Sickbay."

"What is it?"

"I require the Captain's presence on the Bridge."

"You've got to be kidding."

"Doctor, I never kid. May I speak to the Captain?"

"What can I do for you, Mr Spock?"

"Lt Uhura has just picked up a signal from an unknown vessel, addressed to you. He called himself Tobias."

"I'll be right up."

McCoy followed Kirk to the Bridge, much to Spock's surprise.

"Doctor, what are you doing here?"

"Keeping an eye on my patient."

He wasn't the only one looking Kirk's way. Everyone on the Bridge was now staring at the man who looked like their Captain. But what in the world was he wearing? Kirk seemed to also be somewhat stunned. He seemed for a moment to be transfixed on the starfield ahead of them.

"You all right?"

"I was just thinking how much brighter the stars are."

"Are they really that much brighter? Or are you just seeing what you want to see?"

Then Kirk remembered what he was up here for. Turning around to face Uhura, he asked, "Can you get that signal through now, Commander... I mean Lieutenant."

"Still trying, sir."

Spock was still at the Science station, checking on some sensor readings, when Uhura finally got the line open.

"Audio only, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

"Tobias, this is James T Kirk. I told you I'd find you no matter where you went."

"Kirk. But it isn't possible."

"We have you on sensors, phasers are locked in. Give it up Tobias, there is no where else to run."

"Why so anxious? Still trying to get back into the good books with Starfleet? You and that crew of yours are no different from us. It was only that infernal luck of yours that kept the lot of you out of a Federation prison. You want me, you come over here and get me. You can even bring your Vulcan shadow if you like."

"No deal."

"What's the matter, lost your nerve? Then the rumours are true. The Klingons killed the wrong Kirk. At least your son had some guts."

"There is a small planet two parsecs away. Pleags. I'll meet you there at fourteen hundred hours if that rust bucket of yours can make it. Kirk out."

"You're not seriously thinking of going down there?"

"This has nothing to do with you. It is my fight."

"May I point out that this is our time and this Tobias entered it to commit some kind of crime. That makes it our fight as well... Captain."

Kirk's head was starting to spin. He needed somewhere quiet to think things out. He was getting too old for all this.

"Mr Spock, may I borrow your quarters for a while? I'd like a place to rest."

"Certainly, Captain, but would not your own quarters be more suitable?"

"They belong to someone else." He didn't say another word.

It was an hour later when the door buzzer sounded. To his surprise, he found Uhura standing there.

"May I come in?"

"Of course, Nyota... Lieutenant. I'm sorry, I keep forgetting."

"Do you trust this Tobias to go down there alone?"

"No. But I can't allow him to find out that it is only me back here. I can't let him get away."

"Getting yourself killed because you're still grieving over your son is not going to help matters. Remember Lt Barlow? You told him once not to let hate and anger control his life. You went out of your way to help him after Orion pirates killed his family. If he were still on board today I'm sure he would want to repay the favour."

"They were just words said by someone else."

"That is a pack of lies. You're so intent on feeling sorry for yourself, because you've lost a son. Because you've grown old. Well, Captain, that happens to all of us eventually. I'm just sorry that I've evidently wasted my life following you. Good evening, Captain."

Pleags was a small planetoid with scattered vegetation and limited animal life. Tobias had agreed to meet in a small valley, one that offered hiding places for the extra men that he had brought down. He saw Kirk standing at the other end. There was no-one with him. This was almost too easy.

"Well, I never thought I'd see the day when your shadow wasn't beside you."

"Don't worry about him, Tobias, he's busy taking care of the men you brought with you."

At first Tobias thought he might be joking. Then he saw a wicked smile come across Kirk's face.

"What's the matter, Tobias? Afraid I might be telling the truth? Can't you face me on a one-to-one basis?"

"I can take you any time."

"I wouldn't try your ship either," Kirk said as he watched Tobias reach for his communicator. "They should be having problems of their own by now."

It was then that Spock appeared from behind a rock formation where Tobias knew his men to be hiding. Only this was a different Spock; this one wore a blue uniform. The reality of the situation suddenly hit Tobias like the effect of a phaser on stun.

"The Enterprise isn't really here."

"Depends on which one you're talking about. You said before that we were the same. That is one point where you are wrong. What we did, we did out of friendship. What you did, you did out of a lust for power. It cost a lot of lives and now you are going to pay... but not at my hands. Mr Spock, did you have any trouble?"

"None. As you expected, they were surprised to see these uniforms. Before they could recover it was too late. The ship is undamaged and ready for your return home."

"Just one more thing to take care of." Kirk hit the button on his phaser so swiftly that Tobias never knew what had hit him.

"The best prisoner is an unconscious one. Shall we go, Mr Spock?"

"Indeed, Captain."

Tobias' ship had been rigged so that Kirk could handle it from the small bridge. Now he sat there saying good-bye to some old friends.

"Would you also tell Lt Uhura that she did make the right choice. She will know what I mean."

"Will you be all right?"

"Yes, Bones, I think I will be now."

Spock called to the Enterprise to beam back. Just as the transporter started to take effect Kirk heard him say, "Live long and prosper... my friend."

No-one was more surprised than Admiral Nogura when Kirk practically materialised Tobias, ship and crew right on Starfleet's front doorstep. This time there was no big deal about his latest feat. Instead he had insisted that Nogura remain silent as to who delivered Tobias to them. Nogura understood and arranged for a shuttle to take him back to the Enterprise. As far as anyone was concerned, James T. Kirk was returning from shore leave.

Back on board his Enterprise, McCoy caught up with him in one of the viewing rooms, staring out into the star field.

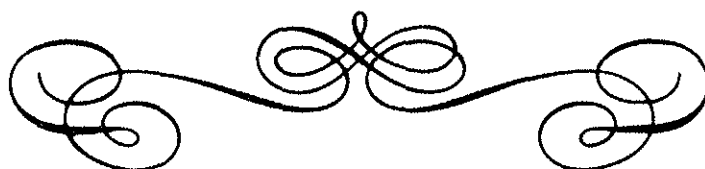
"Well, are the stars as bright?"

"Just the way I remember them. And this time, I am really looking at them."

"Good, and now that you have that cleared up, do you remember that you owe me half a bottle of brandy? I've been waiting years to collect."

A deep smile crawled along Kirk's face and this time stayed. It seemed all the ghosts had finally been buried.

"As a matter of fact, Bones, I think I may just have something in my quarters that will fit the bill."



MY FRIEND

by

Helen Cakebread

The high mountains overlooked the lake which shone like glass as the sun gleamed over it. The clear blue water was very warm. A lone man swam, barely making a sound. He was enjoying himself. It had been a long time since he had taken shore leave. Until now he had never wanted to; he was happy doing the job he loved.

He stopped and floated for a while, getting his bearings. As he did so he noticed the sun going behind the clouds. A storm was coming, he realised; his time sense had let him down. Asata Ibe was very like Earth, but at this season storms came every six hours.

The Vulcan turned and began to swim for the bank, but the rising waves pushed him further from his camp site until at last he was able to pull himself from the water to lie on the wet earth.

It was perhaps unusual for a Vulcan to swim, coming as he did from a desert world, but he had a Human mother who had taken him to Earth to visit his grandfather. While there she had taken him to the baths and taught him to swim; at first he was not sure if he liked it, but as he learned he came to love the feeling of weightlessness.

Now his only thought was to find cover. The storms did not last long, but it was cold for a Vulcan, and the rain fell like knives on his bare back. He pulled himself up, only to slip on the wet muddy ground. He was becoming tired when he felt someone grab his arm, and heard a shout in his ear.

"There's a cave ahead. Try to stand - I'll help."

Spock pulled himself up and held onto the arm, stumbling until he was inside a dry cave, where he fell, not knowing where he was. He felt a rough towel being rubbed over him, then he was pushed down onto something soft and warm, and knew no more as sleep claimed him.

When he woke the sun was shining. A pair of jeans - a little short in the leg - and a shirt lay beside him; Spock dressed and stepped outside the cave.

The man bending over a fire looked up and smiled. "There's a stream round the back if you want to wash, but hurry up - I'm serving breakfast."

Spock nodded, and was soon back, to be handed a cup of coffee. Normally he never drank it, but he was glad of its warmth. "I do not eat breakfast," he said.

"Of course you do. There's brown bread, and cheese - I know Vulcans don't eat meat. By the way, I'm called Jim."

"Spock."

"Well, now we're friends."

"If I may borrow these clothes until I find my own? Then you can be on your own again."

"Couldn't I stay with you? My friend had to return, and I was just leaving when the storm came. Anyway, you shouldn't be here alone either."

Spock could see that it would be a waste of time to argue, so he gave in with a slight nod. Jim just grinned and slapped him on the shoulder, then said, "Sorry."

They broke camp and were soon on their way to Spock's site. His gear was safe, so he changed clothes and felt better.

"We could make it to the foot of the mountains before another storm comes," Jim said.

They set off, the ground soon becoming more stony and loose underfoot, but they made it with time to spare, and were warm and enjoying their meal by the time the storm struck.

Jim cast a sidelong glance at his new-found friend and wondered what was troubling him. He knew for a fact that Vulcans controlled their emotions, so why could he read this one so clearly? He looked away before Spock could notice that he also had something on his mind.

Was it only last week that he had been told he was to be promoted to Starship Captain, something he had always dreamed about. Rumour said that he would be given the Enterprise, as the Captain and First Officer had both left.

If so, how would the crew take to him? He had many ideas to try out. Would he be welcome? He had also been told that a Vulcan would be his First Officer. *If only it was this one*, he thought: he had a feeling they would make a good team.

Spock clasped his hands together. Somehow he must make up his mind. After the Captain had left he was told he would become First Officer; he was not afraid of command, but did not want it - he liked being left alone to his work. Of course, he could always leave. His father would welcome him back to Vulcan. But could he do that? He knew he must make a decision soon - there were only three weeks left.

The next day was bright and clear. After they had eaten they set off with the Vulcan leading the way. The path grew narrower, and loose stones tumbled over the edge. Spock pointed out the way they must climb, then tied the rope around himself and started up. Jim let out the rope and watched; soon it was his turn to follow.

There was not much time for talking, only to point out where the best foot and hand holds were. Jim looked up to see a storm moving in; they found an overhanging ledge and huddled together to keep warm.

When the storm passed they knew they must take extra care for a while until the cliff dried out, but soon the sun was blazing down on them as they came over the crest to sit and gaze around them. The land stretched out below them like a coat of many colours. Both men were lost in their thoughts, as though time had stood still.

"We must get down to that ledge again," Spock said at last, "or be caught in the open."

They started back down again, carefully, as both were tired. They reached the ledge just as the rains came, but the wind had changed direction, and this time both were soaked.

The Vulcan started off again, halting as they reached a narrow section.

"Let me go first," Jim said.

He edged across, breathing a sigh of relief as he reached solid ground. Spock followed, but halfway across the ledge gave way to send him sliding down the cliff. There was nothing he could grab hold of, but at last he came to a halt.

"Spock, are you all right?" Jim shouted.

Spock tried to answer, but he must have swallowed some dust, for he found he could not speak. He felt the rope being pulled up, and tried to help, but his hands were torn. At last he was pulled over the edge, to lie still.

Jim could feel the rope biting into his flesh. His hands hurt like hell. He reached for his pack, somehow got the water bottle out and poured some water onto Spock's lips. He knew they would never make it back to the camp site. There was only one thing to do, and he pulled out his communicator.

"Centre 19, come in. We need medical aid."

"This is Centre 19. How badly are you hurt?"

"We're stuck on a mountain, and I have a badly injured Vulcan. Can you send aid?"

"We'll try to get hold of someone, but it'll take time."

"Could we be beamed off?" Jim asked, getting angrier as he worried about the Vulcan, who had not moved.

"Yes, you could, but we can't do it. Is there anything else we can do?"

"Yes. Link me through to the Enterprise."

The line went dead. *Damn!* he thought.

"This is the Starship Enterprise. What can we do for you?" said a very Scottish voice.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk. Lock on and beam us both aboard." He leaned over the Vulcan. "Hold on, Spock."

A transporter beam took them off the purple mountain.

When Spock awoke he looked up into a pair of blue eyes. He heard a grunt, then a voice spoke.

"He's awake now, Jim."

Spock turned his head. He had not dreamed it. So this was Captain Kirk; he should

have known.

"Well, I wanted to meet my First Officer, but I didn't think it would be like this."

"When I am recovered I will transfer off the ship, Captain," Spock said.

Kirk stepped in closer. "Leave? No. Do you think I hauled you up that mountain just for you to leave? I know you don't want to work with a green Captain, but I hope to learn. Please stay for five years, then if you want to leave I won't stop you."

Spock looked at the man. He had a feeling it would be he who would learn, and the way Jim had spoken he did have a choice. And both knew it was only for five years...

Spock raised his hand, his fingers parted. Kirk stepped closer and touched them with his own.

"I give you my oath to stay with you and serve as your First Officer."

Kirk moved away. "Now you must rest, as we still have two weeks of our holiday."

Spock closed his eyes.



DIVISIONS

by

Teresa Abbott

"No!" The word was wrenched from McCoy's throat, emerging as little more than a harsh croak. Angry and worried, the Doctor leaned towards the viewscreen. "I can't, and won't, sanction it. You don't understand what it is that you're asking!" As he said the words, he saw the look on the other man's face, and knew that his protest was futile.

The Starfleet Admiral whose image was on the desk-top viewscreen sighed, and leaned back in his chair.

"Doctor, believe me, if there was any other way we could achieve our objectives we would do so. But the future of an entire planet, and maybe an entire section of space, is at stake. Our physicians and psychiatrists have been studying the relevant Enterprise log entries for months. They all agree that there is no overwhelming danger to the Captain's life. Within 48 hours the situation will have reached a crisis and be resolved one way or another. What we are proposing seems reasonable for that length of time. We're asking you to supervise the procedure."

Procedure, thought McCoy bitterly. *Is that how you talk about a man's inner torment?* He tried a last, useless protest. "And if it should prove fatal to Captain Kirk? Can you afford to lose one of your best officers this way?"

The Admiral's face was unyielding. "We're all expendable, Doctor. It goes with the job. I can't order this mission, as the situation is too unusual. I'm asking you, Dr McCoy, to put the proposition to Captain Kirk, and to oversee the process personally. Our representatives are already waiting on Neural, and we must have a decision within the hour. Call me as soon as you can." And the screen went dark.

One hour! McCoy almost groaned aloud at the deadline. It was the middle of the ship's night, and Kirk, Spock, and the regular bridge crew were all asleep. McCoy himself had been snatching a hurried nap when the priority message from Starfleet had come through. He got up now from the chair and started to dress, his thoughts racing.

The Enterprise had been in orbit around Canis 2 for three weeks. Once again they'd been saddled with a tricky diplomatic mission. They were representing the Federation during some complicated negotiations, and Kirk and Spock had spent some 12 hours a day in tedious discussions. They couldn't even take a break from the talks. The Canusians operated a highly secretive tribal society, and in order to be allowed to take part, both Kirk and Spock had had to be temporarily sworn in as blood brothers of the race. Only the two of them were permitted to enter the council chambers; were they to leave before the negotiations were complete, the Canusians would never forgive the insult, and the Federation would lose an invaluable world on the fringes of charted space.

Kirk had found the whole situation particularly boring. The planet was hot and dry, which pleased Spock but sapped the Human's energy, and whereas the Vulcan found a certain pleasure in the convoluted logical analysis of the treaty details, Kirk was frustrated and longing for a more active duty.

McCoy wondered now if it was fair even to put the Starfleet proposition to an already exhausted Captain. He knew without a shadow of a doubt what Kirk's answer would be, for Jim would always disregard any risk to himself in order to ensure the safety of others.

Having finished dressing, McCoy made his way along the corridors to Kirk's cabin, and entered using the override. The sleepights came on inside the room on his entry, and McCoy crossed to the bed where Kirk lay asleep, the lines of fatigue showing clearly on his face even though he was resting.

McCoy stood looking down at the man who was his Captain and his friend, and his courage failed him. How could he ask Kirk to endure what Starfleet proposed? It was too much to ask any man.

"Doctor?" The quiet voice from the doorway made McCoy spin round guiltily, and he saw Spock's outline silhouetted in the opening. The Vulcan looked questioningly at the Doctor, curious about McCoy's untypical behaviour. Despite McCoy's efforts to conceal it, Spock had seen the concern in the Doctor's face, and at whom it was directed, and the realisation disturbed the Vulcan. "Is there a problem?"

McCoy knew that his face had given too much away, and he hastily ushered Spock from the room. No use in hiding anything from the Vulcan. As First Officer he'd have to know sooner or later. And it might help to talk things over with someone else who also had Kirk's best interests at heart. "Not here. You'll wake him. Let's go to your room and talk".

Spock had expected McCoy to affirm that everything was all right. The unexpected request for advice perturbed him, and he led the way into his own quarters without protest, lowering the temperature setting automatically as he did so.

McCoy sat at the desk, and after a moment Spock sat opposite him. The Doctor paused for a moment and studied the Vulcan, noticing that he too looked more tired than usual, though it was probably only Kirk and himself who would notice. Spock's face was closed and impassive, which meant that he'd already begun to suspect that there was trouble. McCoy sighed. He was used to talking to Spock by way of sarcastic comments and argument. Neither of those were appropriate here, and he didn't find it easy to begin. Finally, deciding that there was no easy way to broach such an issue and realising that time was racing on, McCoy plunged in with the facts.

"A short while ago I received a priority message from Starfleet. Apparently a critical situation has developed on Neural, the planet where Tyree and his people live." He paused, allowing Spock a moment to recall the place where both he and Kirk had almost lost their lives, and the innocent Hill People whose lives they had had to change for ever.

"I wasn't happy about Tyree's mental state when we left there. He seemed to be irrational with grief, and bent on revenge. As you know, Starfleet has been supplying his side with weapons on a basis strictly equivalent to what the Klingons are giving to the other side. It now appears that he's no longer satisfied. He wants weapons of mass destruction to kill the opposition now, or he too will do a deal with the Klingons. The only person he'll talk to is Jim."

"I see." Spock didn't see at all. He understood the dilemma, but it was also imperative that they stay and finish the delicate negotiations they were engaged in. "What is Starfleet proposing?"

McCoy took a deep breath. "They want the Captain to go to Neural, and persuade Tyree

not to do a deal with the Klingons."

Spock shifted impatiently. "Illogical. What do they propose happens here? These talks have taken years to arrange."

McCoy swallowed. "They propose that he stay here and finish those as well."

For once, Spock was confused. At any other time, McCoy would have teased him about his slowness in uptake. But perhaps, to be fair, Spock didn't understand because the solution was so illogical it would never present itself to him as viable. The Vulcan spoke slowly, watching McCoy, realising that the Doctor was not going to help him work it out. "The Captain cannot be in two places at once."

The silence in the room lengthened, and then abruptly something in the Vulcan's eyes changed, and the Doctor knew that Spock felt the same anger as he himself did. "They are not proposing... "

"Yes, Spock, they are. I told them it was an unfair thing to expect, but they won't listen. Apparently their doctors have decided it will do no lasting harm." McCoy leaned forward. "You and I saw what it did to him, Spock, to be split into two separate people. I can't, as his doctor or his friend, put him through that again!"

They sat in silence, each recalling their own memories of the time when a transporter malfunction had torn Kirk into his good and bad sides. Finally, Spock stirred. "I suggest, Doctor, you give me the full details."

McCoy shrugged helplessly. "Apparently Starfleet Personnel has been studying the records of our survey on Alpha 177 in great detail, and has come to the conclusion that what happened there could be deliberately reproduced. They have ample supplies of the yellow magnetic ore which caused the peculiarity, and don't think that such a process would harm the Captain. Or not physically, at least."

"And if this were to happen, which half would they propose goes where?"

Again, McCoy shrugged. "Logically - though heaven knows there's nothing logical about the suggestion - the so-called 'good' half would stay here. The Canusians are a very gentle and humanitarian people, and would probably respond even better to a Kirk with those qualities. It's not as if there are any decisions left to make. All the treaty details have been agreed on. All he'd have to do is attend the formal signing ceremonies and official functions, and they estimate that he could cope with those."

"But could Tyree cope with his 'evil' side?"

"Again, Starfleet has studied the records, and decided that the other half wasn't 'evil', but just more ruthless and uncontrolled. A lot of his earlier actions, like the initial attack on Janice, happened before he'd come to terms with the situation. Towards the end, he almost had himself in control, and all that was missing was his humanity and caring. Starfleet think Tyree will respond well to that ruthlessness, as will the Klingons who respect a show of force. But in case he does start to get disloyal thoughts, you'd have to go with him to provide a moderating influence."

"With HIM?" Spock looked down at his hands, remembering. The image of his Captain, hurt and confused by his lack of decision making ability, and growing ever weaker, was still very much in his thoughts. Spock had told Kirk that his seeming lack of compassion was

simply the way a Vulcan was. That didn't stop him feeling anguish inside as he'd watched the Captain's bitter struggle to come to terms with the situation. When Kirk, at the end, had thanked him 'from both of us', Spock knew that his admiration had shown in his face. The incident had gone a long way towards forming his early respect for the Captain.

But now? To leave the weaker one alone, because of Starfleet's whim? It was unthinkable. Who would Jim turn to for support?

And it was similarly impossible to envisage the other going alone, as, unmonitored, who knew what schemes he might come up with?

The solution, of course, was staring Spock in the face, but he dared not voice it, and shuddered visibly even at the thought.

"Spock?" McCoy saw the shudder and misinterpreted it. "Don't worry. He'll be all right. I'll watch the one and you'll watch the other. Somehow he'll make it."

Spock shook his head, and his voice was barely a whisper. "They both need me, Doctor."

McCoy stared at him, and his face showed his horror as he realised what the Vulcan was proposing; that Spock, too, undergo the separation procedure, so that neither Kirk should be alone. With the horror was a deeper emotion as he realised the enormity of what the Vulcan was offering. The Doctor sat back and his voice was gruff. "Forget it. It's not necessary. In any case, Jim would forbid it."

The Vulcan looked up. "Then I would go to a higher authority. I doubt if they will have the same objection."

"Spock." Not for the first time, McCoy found himself in the role of counselor. "Forgive me for speaking bluntly, but I don't think you've fully come to terms with yourself in your present state! You don't know that you'd be able to cope with such a split. And even if we assume that you'd become half Vulcan and half Human, which half would go with whom?"

"My Human half will go to Tyree's planet. It may act as a moderating influence on his excesses."

McCoy shook his head. "Spock, in his ruthless form Jim could hurt a Human Spock very badly. You might both find that difficult to live with later on."

"Negative, Doctor. We will cope. And I do not believe that Jim, in any form, would do me any lasting harm. As I said, my Human vulnerability might even curb his worst ideas. More important than that, his weaker side will need the Vulcan's logic and support to lean on."

McCoy hesitated. If they sat here much longer, Spock might even begin to convince him. The idea did have a certain appeal. Still, he made up his mind. "I'm sorry, Spock, I won't allow it."

"Won't allow what, Doctor?" Kirk stood in the doorway, and he was smiling, but his eyes were puzzled, and his formal use of McCoy's title indicated that he meant to receive an answer. "I can hear you two arguing even in my sleep! What's the problem?"

His eyes travelled from one to the other of his friends, taking in McCoy's discomfort, and coming to rest on Spock's rigid, controlled expression. He held the Vulcan's eyes. "Spock?"

McCoy sighed. The time for discussion was obviously over, and Spock was not the right person to deal with this. The Doctor indicated the empty chair at the table. "Sit down, Jim. There's been a priority message from Starfleet."

"Starfleet?" Kirk was totally alert now, and not a little angry, but controlled his temper as he realised there was more to the situation than met the eye. "Why wasn't I informed immediately?"

"The message came through to me because there are medical implications, and they wanted to discuss them with a Doctor first." McCoy inserted the message tape into the desktop viewer, and activated the screen. "View it for yourself."

Kirk glanced once more at Spock, but there was no help for him there. He suppressed the prickling of fear he felt as he wondered what could have so affected his Vulcan friend, and turned to the viewscreen.

McCoy watched as Kirk took in the details, and his heart ached for the Captain's predicament. Kirk was a consummate actor, but both the Doctor and Spock saw the horror, quickly suppressed, as he understood what was being proposed. How could he refuse? The emotional blackmail was skilfully done, and left him no option.

After a long moment, Kirk looked up at McCoy. Now he understood what his friends had been discussing, and why the Vulcan was controlling so rigidly. He decided he would spare them both any further anguish. "Well, Doctor, I suggest you commence preparations immediately. Too much time has already been wasted."

"Jim..." McCoy was distressed.

"I'll meet you in the transporter."

"Jim!" McCoy reached over and put his hand on Kirk's arm. "Don't suppress your feelings about this. We both know how this must be for you."

Kirk shook him off angrily and stood, his eyes bleak. "How will it help to talk about it, Doctor? I can cope with it better alone."

McCoy shook his head. Then he noticed Spock about to open his mouth, and knew the Vulcan was going to tell Jim his suggestion that he too undergo the separation process. McCoy realised two other things simultaneously.

Firstly, that Kirk would never allow Spock to make such a sacrifice voluntarily, and secondly, that although McCoy was worried for the Vulcan's well-being, his suggestion made sense, because Jim did need the Vulcan in both his forms.

McCoy took a deep breath and lied, hoping that Spock would understand and support his statement. "Wait, Captain, there is one more thing. Starfleet have ordered that Spock also undergoes the process, and goes with you."

Kirk faltered and sat down white faced, even as Spock met the Doctor's eyes across the table and fractionally nodded his approval.

"No." Kirk's voice was a whisper. "I can't allow it." Yet he was ashamed that a part of him clung to the suggestion as to a lifeline.

"Captain". It was the first time the Vulcan had spoken since Kirk had entered the room, and his voice was gentle. "I have discussed this at some length with the Doctor, and we both agree it *is* the only workable solution."

Kirk looked up and met Spock's eyes, and was moved by the concern he saw there. But the memories of what he himself had endured the last time he had been torn apart were all too clear. He couldn't, in all conscience, put Spock through the same. He shook his head. "No..."

The Vulcan's quiet tone cut him off. "Jim, have you considered that it will hurt me far more NOT to do this?"

McCoy held his breath, realising that the Vulcan was talking to Kirk as if they were alone, and privileged that Spock trusted him enough to do so. It was obvious from Kirk's face that he acknowledged the simple truth of those words; if the situation were reversed, he would want to do the same. He would take some comfort from the fact that it was a Starfleet order, and could not be easily disobeyed.

He stood, but his eyes still rested on Spock. "Notify Starfleet, Doctor, and ready the transporter room. If we're to do this thing we must do it immediately before we all lose our nerve!"

Much to McCoy's relief, the actual duplication process went smoothly. Kirk went first, both because he knew what to expect, and because he felt it would give moral support to the Vulcan. Walking those few steps to the transporter pad was one of the hardest things Kirk had ever done, and there was a brief moment when his courage almost failed him. McCoy saw his hesitation, and wondered whether they should call the whole thing off. Then the Doctor calmed down as he saw the Captain steady himself and proceed across the room.

The Doctor knew that Kirk's smile was really for Spock's benefit, to reassure his friend that the situation was not really that traumatic, but McCoy was sure that inside, Kirk was as sick to his stomach as he himself was.

Spock operated the controls personally, and although he did so with infinite smoothness, there was a suppressed violence in the action. McCoy noted the fact that Spock had refused to look Kirk in the eye, and stored it as something to analyse later on.

Scotty stood by in the corner of the room, waiting to operate the controls for the Vulcan, when it came to his turn. They had decided that they had to include the Engineer in their plan, for although McCoy could have activated the equipment, they needed someone more experienced at hand in case of any complications. Kirk wasn't going to risk losing his First Officer to a transporter malfunction.

The beam shimmered and the long seconds ticked away, and then Jim was once again standing on the platform. Somehow there was no doubt in McCoy's mind that this was the gentle half of his friend. The Doctor hurried forward, and took him by the arm, his scanner whirring in the other hand. "Are you okay, Jim?" As he said the words, he was relieved that his readings all seemed quite strong. Perhaps knowing what was going to happen HAD lessened the shock to the body, for Kirk's was a very strong mind.

Jim shook him off. "I'm fine. I'll just wait until..."

"No." The Doctor was adamant. "I appreciate how you feel, but this is no time for an

emotional reunion with your other self. Go to your quarters and lie down, and I'll come down and check you over as soon as I can. You have to beam down to the planet in less than an hour and you need the rest."

He expected a protest or argument. The fact that Kirk merely nodded and left the room drove home the fact that this really wasn't the complete Captain.

However, there was no mistaking the other half when he materialised barely seconds later. McCoy took in the aggressive stance, and had to remind himself that this one was also his friend, and he mustn't show his dislike.

McCoy glanced over at Spock, but the Vulcan still seemed withdrawn into a private world, probably mentally preparing himself for the ordeal ahead. McCoy turned again to Kirk. "You know what you have to do?"

Kirk smiled confidently. "Of course, Doctor. Don't worry. I'm sure that everything will go exactly as planned." There was nothing in the words themselves that conveyed insolence, but the tone still implied it.

McCoy hesitated. "All right." Again he paused, unsure how to proceed. They had planned that this Kirk should proceed immediately to the hanger deck, but now, looking at him, the Doctor didn't know if he trusted him enough to let him go alone. He couldn't order Security to escort the Captain there without involving even more people in the scheme. Although McCoy could have taken him personally, he felt that he should stay and be with Spock. He finally made up his mind. "You'd better wait for Spock." And to the Vulcan, more gently, "Are you ready, Spock?"

"Quite ready, Doctor." The Vulcan moved without hesitation to the pad, and said without emotion, "Proceed, Mr. Scott."

McCoy wondered if all this suppression of emotion about what was going to happen was healthy. Still, how would he himself react if he was literally going to be torn in two? Everyone must cope in their own way, and if this was how Spock felt he could deal with it, so be it.

The figure that materialised on the platform seconds later was identical to the one that had left. McCoy, who had anticipated at least some outward difference, was confused. "Spock? Are you all right? Did it work?"

The figure raised an eyebrow. "It worked perfectly, Doctor."

McCoy took a step forward. "I'm sorry, but which Spock am I addressing?"

"I am what you would consider to be the Human side. Now, as time is of the essence, I suggest that we proceed immediately to the hanger deck and that Captain Kirk and I make our departure."

McCoy smiled wryly. Why had he ever expected the Human Spock to be more, well - Human! "I think we should at least wait for your other half, Spock."

"Unnecessary, Doctor. He is quite all right and will proceed directly to the Captain's cabin. Mr. Scott is perfectly capable of overseeing the end of the process, and escorting him if necessary."

McCoy was still unsure, but time WAS becoming critical. "Very well." He followed the two of them from the room to the shuttlecraft hanger deck, where they prepared to climb into the waiting craft. The Doctor watched them with a growing sinking feeling in his stomach. No-one knew how distance would affect the separated persona. At the last minute McCoy reached out and grabbed Spock's arm, and felt him pull away as he did so. "Spock, promise me at the first sign of trouble you'll turn back. And for heaven's sake make sure he COMES back."

Spock merely raised an eyebrow. "Of course, Doctor. That goes without saying". Then he too climbed into the craft.

McCoy watched the Galileo as it went through the standard safety checks, and then watched it on the viewscreen until he could no longer see it without magnification. At the back of his mind, a strange doubt niggled. Why had Spock pulled away from him when he had touched him? Surely in his Human form he shouldn't be bothered by any personal contact? And the raised eyebrow and clipped, unemotional manner of speech? But McCoy had asked him his identity, and surely the VULCAN half wouldn't have lied to him?

McCoy reached for the intercom at the same moment as Scott's voice issued through it. "Doctor McCoy, please come to the transporter room immediately."

It was, of course, the Vulcan who had gone in the shuttlecraft with Kirk. With hindsight, it seemed all too obvious. McCoy found the Human Spock in the transporter room, resting weakly on the step. Kirk came through the door barely seconds later, having heard the announcement over the intercom. The two friends stared at each other with dismay and not a little curiosity.

McCoy was furious. A ruthless Kirk with a strong, logical Vulcan! The pair could be unstoppable. And who was Jim going to lean on for support, if Spock himself looked confused and shaken? He almost began to tell them so, then decided there was no point in stating the obvious and worrying them further.

He laid a hand on each shoulder, and this time Spock didn't pull away. "What's done is done. He must have had a logical reason for altering the initial plan. Let's get you two down to Sickbay for a thorough check before you beam down to the planet." He steered them from the room, cursing Starfleet bureaucrats soundly under his breath as he did so.

CANIS 2

Kirk sat on the bed in his quarters on the Enterprise with his head in his hands. McCoy had finished all his medical checks and pronounced him as fit as could be expected, then released him to his rooms until the time came to beam down.

Spock had also been released to his quarters, but neither of them had suggested that they use the remaining time on board to talk things through. There were some things it just wasn't possible to talk easily about.

When Kirk had first run to the transporter room on hearing Scott's message, he hadn't yet known what deception the Vulcan had engineered. His mind had reached out to his friend and encountered - nothing. The mental link between them didn't seem to exist. It was still the same now. He reached out, but there was only emptiness. Or maybe a distant echo,

but certainly not from the room next door.

It was a long, long time since Kirk had felt so alone. Probably not since the empty years before he had taken command of his ship, and met its unique First Officer.

This one is my friend too, he reminded himself. It must be even worse for him, for he hasn't been through the experience before, and is learning how to cope for the first time. If I feel the lack of the telepathic link, how must it be for him, whose mind is usually so much more receptive to outside influences? To be walled off inside a Human shell! He needs me more than ever, and I sit here wallowing in self-pity.

At last Kirk stood up, although he found it difficult to summon up the will to take action. He decided that the emotional atmosphere between them would be too overpowering, so they would have to keep their relationship businesslike in order to function effectively on the planet below.

Crossing the room, he activated the door release to the entrance connecting his room to Spock's, and was relieved when it slid open.

Kirk stepped through to find Spock also sitting on the bed, and the temperature of the cabin much lower than usual.

"Mr. Spock, I think it's time we beamed down to Canis 2. The elders there are expecting us."

Spock looked up with bleak eyes and started to protest that he would be of no help, but Kirk put up a hand and silenced him. "That's an order, Mr. Spock." He said it gently to lessen the impact, but there was still no mistaking the command tone, and Kirk was surprised that he had found the strength from somewhere to be strong for both of them.

For a moment something flickered in Spock's eyes, and Kirk wondered if he would refuse. Then slowly the First Officer stood and followed his Captain from the room.

In the event, the first day went better than any of them could have anticipated. Of course, it helped that all the treaty details had been finalised, but Kirk still found it less wearisome than he had before. *Perhaps it was the other side of me that felt most of the boredom, he thought ruefully.*

He noticed at one time that Spock looked uncomfortably hot, and had to stop himself from smiling at his friend's discomfort. Maybe next time the Captain moaned about how hot a place was, Spock would be more understanding!

Kirk could feel that his own body was weaker, though, and as hour passed tedious hour in lengthy and obscure speeches and celebrations, he only managed to keep going by drinking copious amounts of water and reminding himself that this time he wouldn't be able to rely on Spock to make all the decisions. Somehow his friend's unhappiness gave him the strength he needed. He also knew that tomorrow, the final day, he would need frequent stimulants to stay the course, and began preparing his arguments for the inevitable battle with McCoy.

The Doctor did indeed meet them in the transporter room, and ordered them both to Sickbay for the usual checks. When McCoy had finished, he frowned. "Well, neither of you is in the peak of health. Spock, try and relax a bit more. You can't keep driving yourself any longer to the same Vulcan limits. And Jim - well, there's no need for me to tell you how you

feel. I suggest you go straight to your quarters and rest."

The Captain yawned. "For once, Doctor, I agree with you." He hesitated. "A quick game of chess, Spock, before bed? " He was ashamed to realise that a part of his mind was hoping that Spock would refuse, so that they wouldn't be forced into a situation where they would have to talk.

But Spock was already shaking his head. "Thank you, Jim, but I too am tired. I think I'll go straight to bed." And he left.

The Captain rose to follow, but McCoy held him back. "Jim, why are you two so ill at ease with each other? I would have expected you to get on better with Spock without the Vulcan influences."

Kirk shook his head. "I don't know, Bones. If I were whole I'd maybe react differently. Right now, I need the Vulcan's strength to see me through. This Spock needs help *from* me, and I don't feel well enough to give it. And I can't believe that he didn't know what the Vulcan was planning, and could have warned me. All that time we were in the transporter room he wouldn't look me in the eye. I'm sure the complete Spock had a reason for his action, and perhaps if we're ever restored to our complete selves, I'll understand it. Right now, I feel a little betrayed, and unsure how to help the half I've got."

McCoy took a deep breath. "Jim, I'm going to tell you something that you're not going to like. Starfleet didn't order Spock to go through the Separation procedure. It was only intended for you. Spock was supposed to go with your other half. He suggested the present situation so that you wouldn't be left alone here. I don't think you fully appreciate what it cost Spock to make that offer. I think you should go to him and be with him, even if you can't talk things through."

The Captain had stiffened at the Doctor's words, but still shook his head. "Bones, I can hardly keep my own body and soul together. I just couldn't cope with an emotional analysis. I need to be alone, to think, to rest." Warily he left the sickbay.

McCoy stood and watched him go, deep in thought. A couple of minutes later he had come to a decision, and made his way to Spock's quarters. Someone was going to have to talk to the Human Spock, and if Jim didn't feel able to do it, then the responsibility fell on himself.

Outside the door he raised his hand to press for entry, then froze as he heard the quiet murmur of voices within. Perhaps his little lecture had had the desired effect after all. Smiling, he turned, and silently went back to sickbay.

Kirk had almost passed Spock's door when he hesitated and stopped. For a moment he stood in indecision, hating himself for not having the courage to go and talk to his friend. Then McCoy's words came back to him. *Go to him and be with him, even if you can't talk things through.* Finally, he pressed the entry signal and stepped into the room as the door slid open.

Spock was sitting at his desk reading, and the Captain stood in the doorway ill at ease. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you. You said you were going to sleep."

Spock looked up at him with guarded eyes. "I found I wasn't tired after all."

"Did you know the Vulcan was going to go with my other half, and leave you here with

me?" Kirk was shocked as he said the words. He hadn't meant to voice them out loud, but his sense of betrayal was creating a barrier between them and had to be aired.

Spock was silent for a moment, then looked up without reproach. "We surmised that once set free of you, there was a strong possibility that your other half would not want to return. Although the Doctor was right that you would need the Vulcan's support here, it was also true that the Vulcan would be far more able to physically overcome and return the other Kirk by force if necessary. We felt that to be the greater need. Unfortunately there was no time to discuss the matter."

"You seriously think the other Kirk would have stayed away? It would be suicide, illogical. None of us can survive alone."

Spock smiled wryly, an expression Kirk was not used to seeing. "Your other half is even less logical than you, Captain. I haven't the Vulcan's strength, and might have had trouble convincing him."

Kirk was shaken, and moved unsteadily to sit on the chair. "I'm sorry, Spock. I've totally misunderstood your motivation. It can't have been easy for you to let him go."

"No, it wasn't." And now Spock's voice turned bitter. "I'm totally useless to you here. You might just as well have been left alone."

"Never!" Kirk was shocked and upset that he had acted in such a way as to make his friend believe that. "Spock, I need you now more than I've ever done before. If I haven't shown you that, then don't forget that I'm not myself either, and growing less so by the minute."

They stared at each other, both aware of the other's suffering. Then Spock shifted slightly in his chair. "Perhaps, Jim, we should have that game of chess after all. Your inability to make decisions should make it an easy victory, and I'd be a fool to miss the opportunity." He was smiling as he said the words, and slowly the Captain smiled back.

The following day, McCoy was relieved to find them more relaxed with each other, confident that it would help them to get through the day with greater ease. He handed Kirk some stimulants before the Captain asked.

"Now listen, Jim." His tone emphasised the seriousness of his words. "I'm giving you these because I know you need them, but for heaven's sake don't take them except as a last resort. You're weak enough already, as you know too well, and it's not going to get any better. I don't know what effect this medication will have in your present state."

"Okay, Doctor, I promise." And Kirk wasn't smiling either.

McCoy turned to Spock. "And you? Do you need some stimulants as well?"

Spock hesitated. "Not yet. Tonight may be a different matter."

McCoy frowned. "Well, hopefully by tonight we'll be well on the way to rendezvous with your other halves, and all this stupidity will be over."

After they'd gone, McCoy retreated to Sickbay, where he busied himself with frantic

activity in a vain attempt to mask his worry. He spent a lot of time composing furious mental memos to Starfleet bureaucrats, and it had never been a longer day.

His relief knew no bounds when his two friends transported back to the ship several hours later; then vanished rapidly as he saw the Captain sway and nearly fall, were it not for Spock supporting him.

"Bed for both of you, and that's a medical order. You can tell me about the day some other time. Let's just be thankful that we got through our mission successfully. Jim, I think you should stay in Sickbay where I can keep an eye on you."

Jim shook his head. "Please, Bones. I'll sleep better in my own bed. Tomorrow, if we still haven't made the rendezvous... we'll see." And he left the room.

McCoy turned to Spock, who nodded. "Don't worry, Doctor. I'll stay with him." He followed the Captain from the room, leaving the Doctor staring anxiously after them.

When he was sure that Kirk would be asleep, Spock entered the Captain's quarters and made himself comfortable in the chair in the corner. It seemed to him to be a strange thing to do, for it was foolish to believe that by simply being there he could ward off Kirk's growing weakness and somehow protect him. Yet Spock sorely missed the telepathic link between them, and felt uneasy when Kirk was out of his sight.

Logical or not, tonight he would keep watch and be with the Captain. There was nothing more he could do.

Kirk woke to a pain-filled darkness. His lungs, starved of oxygen, tried to draw in air, but the effort to breathe only intensified his agony. His heart pounded furiously against his ribs, and the sweat of fear broke out cold over his skin as he tried in vain to move, or cry out, or reach for the intercom. With a supreme effort he moved his hand the few inches to where the pain was the most intense, and found the area warm and sticky with blood.

Now confusion and disbelief mingled with his terror. How could he be bleeding when he knew there was no wound? As the roaring in his ears intensified and he knew his life was slipping away, he did what in recent years he had always done. His mind reached out to Spock's in a desperate plea for help, and he called, not to the Human or to the Vulcan, but to the complete entity that was his friend. The reflex action certainly saved his life.

In the chair across the room Spock opened his eyes in the darkness, and sat absolutely still as though listening to some inner voice. Then, "Jim?"

He stood up abruptly, ordering on the lights, and he had crossed the room before the computer had responded. He took in the scene with disbelief. Kirk was unconscious, lying deathly white amidst covers stained with blood. Spock punched the intercom. "Medical emergency, Captain's quarters."

Pushing back the bedclothes he searched for an injury but could find nothing to account for the blood flow - therefore there was nowhere he could apply pressure to try and prevent it. He wished desperately that he could initiate a full meld, which might at least tell him what was going on, but knew he didn't possess the ability. Feeling totally helpless, afraid to move

Kirk for fear of harming him further, he breathed sharply with relief as McCoy burst through the door.

"Oh, my God. What happened, Spock?" The Doctor urgently checked his instruments and didn't like what he found. He turned and snapped at his two assistants. "Hook up life support and get him to Sickbay fast."

Spock was shaking his head, his face grey. "I don't know, Doctor. I thought I heard someone call out to me in my mind, but that isn't possible. I simply don't understand."

McCoy felt a fleeting sympathy for Spock, but his anxiety over Kirk's condition prevented his taking any action. He made for the door, then turned as he saw Spock still standing shocked by the bed. "Come to Sickbay, Spock. He'll need you." He left the room at a run, without waiting to see if Spock was following.

Ten minutes later, the Doctor was as close to despair as he had ever been. He stopped his frantic administrations over Kirk's unconscious form and leaned exhausted on the edge of the bed, his face looking ten years older. Reluctantly he looked up at Spock standing motionless just inside the doorway, and gestured the other staff away so they could be alone.

Spock understood the action only too well, and clenched his fists in a very Human gesture of impotence. "No, I won't accept it."

"Spock." McCoy didn't know what to say. "There's nothing I can do. I don't even understand what's wrong with him. What I do know is that he's slipping away rapidly and I can't risk any more drugs."

In the face of imminent disaster, Spock seemed to find an inner strength. "His other half must have been seriously injured, maybe even killed. Somehow the two of them are sufficiently linked for this to happen."

McCoy was horrified. "Spock, if the other one is dead then I don't see any hope that Jim will survive. Even if he did he would never function adequately. It may be kinder to let him go in peace."

Spock shook his head with growing conviction. "Doctor, I do not believe that the other one is dead. I don't know how, but I feel it." He was suddenly very still. "Perhaps if Jim and his other half are so joined, maybe the Vulcan can reach him through me. I'm not aware of any link and I can't sense his presence in my mind, but..."

"Never mind the buts," McCoy interrupted him. "If there's any kind of chance, try it now. There's nothing more I can do, and he hasn't much time left."

Spock nodded and crossed to sit in the chair next to the bed. He leaned back and closed his eyes, and the Doctor could see him consciously making the effort to relax. For a long moment Spock didn't move and frowned as though in intense concentration, until McCoy almost opened his mouth to urge him to hurry. Then slowly Spock reached out and took the Captain's hand in his own, his other hand reaching out to touch Kirk's temple in the meld position.

Then neither of them moved for a very long, long time.

NEURAL

The shuttlecraft Galileo swung into orbit around planet C9582, now officially named Neural. McCoy had called it a Paradise planet, a Garden of Eden.

The other Kirk would doubtless have called it by the more exotic name used by the Hill People. To Captain James T. Kirk in command of the shuttlecraft it was just a number, the one Starfleet had originally allotted to it on their survey mission many years ago. He saw no reason to give a fancy title to a place that might provide him with an interesting opportunity. He perceived it simply as a means to an end.

Kirk leaned back and stretched in satisfaction. For only the second time in his life he felt completely whole. The first time he had been taken by surprise and had badly misused his opportunities. This time he had had warning of the event, and wouldn't repeat the same mistakes. He watched Spock working the controls, then leaned back and smiled.

"Well, Mr. Spock, at what point did you decide that your Vulcan half should accompany me?"

The Vulcan turned to look at him, and raised an eyebrow. "I compliment you on your perception, Captain. I did not anticipate your noticing so soon."

"Come now, Mr Spock." Kirk's voice was gently mocking. "You knew I would be pleased." Now Kirk leaned forward, and his voice was intense. "The two we left behind are worthless, and you know it. You can't pretend to me that you haven't spent most of your life wishing that you were wholly Vulcan. Well, now you are, and you no longer need tolerate emotions and illogical behaviour. And all I've left behind are the weaknesses that prevent me from taking ruthless action when necessary. Take this planet. It could be a valuable prize for the Federation. But because everyone is blinded by high moral ideals, they let the population suffer in an endless war. Wouldn't it be more logical to give superior weapons to one side and end it once and for all so that the survivors can develop in peace?"

The Vulcan considered, and answered carefully. "Even if it were logical, Starfleet would not permit it."

Kirk brushed the objection aside impatiently. "They'd have to permit it if it were the only deal the Hill People would accept. If you added your voice to mine, we could convince them. What do you say, Mr Spock?"

The Vulcan folded his arms. "All I can say at the moment, is that I am glad that the decision I made to take my Human half's place has been proved correct."

They were met at the beamdown point by several Starfleet officials. Spock was surprised to find that he felt a certain annoyance at this fact. He resented Kirk being studied and gawped at like some scientific curiosity, and wondered at this illogical reaction. He didn't have the same reservations about himself. He knew his outward behaviour had only changed to those who knew him well. However, he felt that Kirk's inner, darker side should be allowed to remain a private matter, and not a subject for general observation.

"Gentlemen, I'm Commodore Matthews." A tall, elderly man stepped forward and shook Kirk's hand. "Welcome to the negotiations, Captain. These are Doctors Wayne and Nesbitt, who will be accompanying us."

Spock noted the flicker of anger and resentment on the Captain's face in the presence of medical personnel, and admired the fact that Kirk managed to keep himself in check.

Commodore Matthews resumed his briefing. "We're already engaged in talks with both the local people and the Klingons. Although our original intention was to stay behind the scenes and not interfere in the lives of the people here, we soon found that to be impossible. Also the Organians have made several representations to Starfleet about their growing concern over the situation here. We've therefore had to come out into the open, and we've arranged this joint conference for all interested parties.

"Our aim is to persuade the Klingons to leave the planet alone, and we will do likewise. None of us can undo the damage that we've done, but any further developments in weapon technology will have to be by the planetary inhabitants alone. The only problem is Tyree. He's still bent on revenge for his wife Nona. We were hoping that if he could see you were lending your voice to ours, he would agree as he knows you the best. We want you to have as little contact with him as possible, Captain. All that is required is that you sit at the table with us and concur with whatever our negotiators say."

Kirk merely inclined his head. "Of course, Commodore." It seemed only the Vulcan detected the undertone of rebellion in his voice.

They made their way to the negotiating tents, the Vulcan looking around with interest. His last visit to this planet had been brief, as he had spent most of the time in Sickbay, and he welcomed the opportunity for a better look around. Inside the tent, Tyree and his people sat at a large round table. Also at the table were Apella, head of the Villagers, and some of his people, as well as a Klingon Commander and his aides. Commodore Matthews sat at one of the empty spaces, and gestured to Kirk and the Vulcan to join him.

Kirk glanced at Tyree curiously. He himself preferred the more ruthless person his old friend had become. They now had a lot in common. They had both shed their old, caring attitudes to become new, hard men. It was a shame that they were being so closely monitored, for alone they could have come to a different arrangement.

The Klingon Commander also studied Kirk. He had heard a lot about Kirk from his fellow Commanders, and they had all said that Kirk's one weakness was his humanity. The Klingon could see no trace of it in the man before him. Maybe these talks would not go as easily as he had supposed.

In the event, they reached a satisfactory conclusion fairly quickly. Both the Klingons and the Federation agreed to leave the planet and supply no more weapons to the local people. In reality, with the Organians breathing down their necks they had no option. The Villagers and the Hill People weren't pleased, but would be helped to reach their own peace with the aid of skilled negotiators.

As soon as it was all concluded, Spock and Kirk were hustled away by the two doctors to their own quarters for medical checks.

The Vulcan sat in his room deep in thought. He found it difficult to think clearly, for his mind, free of its Human restrictions, was more receptive to outside pressures, and he had had to maintain very rigid mental barriers all day to shield himself from the many strong emotions at the negotiations. He had been surprised to discover that he was still linked to this Kirk, despite the changes which had taken place in both of them. He hadn't allowed himself to use

the link, not wishing to intrude upon his friend's private thoughts, and doubting whether either of them would find such a contact welcome in the present circumstances.

There was something about this whole situation which was illogical. The Vulcan rose abruptly and went to see Commodore Matthews.

"Yes, Mr Spock?" The Commodore was completing a report at his desk.

"Sir, I consider it illogical that we have been brought here. Our presence was not essential to the success of the talks. I believe that the seriousness of the situation here has been deliberately exaggerated so that Captain Kirk would agree to the mission."

The Commodore sighed and turned off his viewscreen. He could see there was no further point in concealing anything from the Vulcan. "Yes, Mr. Spock, it was. But I tell you this in the strictest confidence. Ever since your mission on Alpha 177 the senior medical personnel have been putting pressure on us to find a situation we could use to repeat the phenomenon. What happened there was so unusual that they wanted to study it in more depth. Now they will have the opportunity to do so, and not just with one subject, but with two."

Spock was coldly angry, not with Human anger but the rarely seen Vulcan rage. "So he has been used as an experimental guinea pig, and I with him!"

"Mr Spock." Commodore Matthews saw the anger and tried to defuse it. "It was nothing personal against Captain Kirk. We knew he had survived it once, and surmised that he would do so again. It was just unfortunate that the Enterprise was the ship that discovered the effect."

"Unfortunate!" Spock, for once, was lost for words. "Commodore, I hope you personally never have to experience such a situation. You might then use a slightly stronger word than *unfortunate*." Turning, he left the room.

Returning to his quarters, he noticed food and drink laid out on the table. He wouldn't touch the wine, but the fruit juice would be acceptable. He sipped it slowly, preoccupied, wondering if he should tell Kirk what he had discovered. He decided that it was logical that he should. Putting the cup down, he had barely taken two steps across the room before he felt a strange weariness, and realised the drink had been drugged. If he hadn't been so deep in thought, he would have noticed sooner by the taste or smell.

There was no doubt in his mind where the drug had come from. *Jim, what have you done?* As he collapsed, he never realised that for the first time he had thought of this Kirk, too, by his first name.

Kirk was standing in the other room by the connecting door, and smiled to himself as he heard the Vulcan's body fall to the ground. It was almost too easy! Although the doctors knew he was different, they seemed to have difficulty believing it, and had trustingly sent a junior nurse to his room with a sleeping draught when he had complained of an intense headache.

It had been an easy matter to 'persuade' the nurse to give him an extra dose for the night. She seemed even to enjoy the persuasion! When she'd gone, Kirk had quickly broken the code on the connecting door (how dared they lock him in while allowing Spock to go free!) and slipped the medication into the Vulcan's drink. No-one would ever anticipate that he would get out through the Vulcan's unguarded quarters.

Now Kirk entered Spock's room, and leaned over the unconscious figure. He quickly removed both the phaser and the security chip he would need to pass into the outer corridor. Then he hesitated. The next stage in the plan he had designed called on him to kill the Vulcan now, to ensure that there was no trouble later. Kirk, too, was aware of the telepathic link between them, and didn't want the Vulcan finding him through that link. Yet, standing there, he couldn't fire the phaser, and cursed himself for the unexpected emotion he felt when he thought of Spock dead. Finally he spun round and left the room, persuading himself that the sleeping draught would buy him enough time to get away.

The corridors were empty, and Kirk was soon in the outer courtyard. He didn't have a definite plan. He had hoped to get in touch with Tyree somehow, and convince his friend privately that they both stood to gain more by prolonging the conflict with the Villagers. He recognised a pathway leading through the trees as being the one that led to the leader's tent, and confidently he vanished into the bushes.

He never felt the blow that struck him from behind. The world exploded in an orange ball of pain, then went dark. Yutan, one of Tyree's people, stood and looked down at Kirk's helpless form. He had been one of Tyree's staunchest supporters in the old days before the strangers had come with their weapons, but now led a rebel band that hankered after the peaceful ways, and he blamed Starfleet for starting all of their troubles.

"You will pay for what you have done," he whispered, and raising his spear, plunged it into the unconscious Kirk's side.

The Vulcan struggled awake through many drug induced layers. Kirk's distress was like a beacon in the darkness. Spock knew immediately that it was Kirk on the Enterprise who called, and not his own more wayward companion. Being Vulcan he also understood the reason. His own Kirk must be hurt and unconscious, and it was the other who was feeling and transmitting the pain.

Why didn't his own other self do anything to ease the agony? He knew the answer to that before he had finished the thought. The Human Spock would be unaware of the danger as he possessed no telepathic abilities. At once the Vulcan sat up and closed his eyes, reaching down inside his mind to that part of him that was still bonded to the Human Spock on the Enterprise. As soon as he was confident that his warning had been received he stood up and left the room. He would have to find his own Kirk quickly and see to the injury, or both halves of his Captain would die.

The Vulcan found Kirk almost immediately, still lying in the clearing where Yutan had left him. The Hillsman had obviously thought him dead, but Spock knew before he reached the body that life was still present. Kneeling down he examined the wound. It had bled a fair deal but the spear was still embedded in the flesh and had stopped the worst of the blood flow. The Vulcan wrenched the primitive weapon out and applied pressure to the correct points on Kirk's body to prevent further blood loss.

Gently turning Kirk over he felt for the pulse and found only a faint flicker. He decided he would have to initiate a healing meld, even though he didn't know if he could do so properly with only half of Kirk's complete mind. He pulled out his communicator and called the Starfleet doctor on duty, giving his location and the drugs he deemed it was necessary for them to bring.

Then he placed his hands on Kirk's forehead and blotted out the external world as he

reached for Kirk's mind in an attempt to hold him to life. At some point he realised that those on the Enterprise also needed his assistance, and did what he could to mentally aid them too. It seemed as if the four of them were joined in one large mystic circle, and he held his position until the Starfleet personnel arrived and gently pulled him away.

Some time later Doctor Nesbitt came over to Spock, who was sitting under the trees regaining his strength after the meld. "I'm sorry, but I don't think Captain Kirk will live."

The Vulcan shook his head. "He will live."

The Doctor glanced over at Commodore Matthews, who shrugged helplessly and came to join them. "There's nothing further the Doctors can do, Mr. Spock. I'm truly very sorry."

The Vulcan stood abruptly. "If there is nothing more that can be done here, then beam us both back onto the Galileo."

The Commodore was uncomprehending. "Why? There's nothing there - "

Spock walked across the clearing and stood protectively over Kirk's body, and the anger in his stance challenged anyone to question him. "Beam us onto the shuttlecraft, Commodore, and quickly. Doctor McCoy will be waiting. I'm taking the Captain home to the Enterprise."

ENTERPRISE

It seemed to Kirk that he was standing in a leafy glade. The sun poured down warmth onto his ice-cold skin, the rays dancing and jostling through the gaps in the leaves above. In the distance was the sound of running water - a stream, perhaps, or a waterfall, and with it mingled the muted cries of many birds. He stood and looked at it all, wanting to move, but he hurt inside with a terrible pain and couldn't will his feet to take a single step.

Then he noticed what appeared to be his body lying under the trees at the far side of the clearing, and the Vulcan bending over it, his hands in the meld position. *Am I dead then?* he thought, confused, wishing there were a way to let his friend know that he was there.

But the Vulcan spoke suddenly, or so it seemed. *Come closer, Jim. Take my hand so I can help you.*

Kirk shook his head. *I can't. It hurts too much.*

The Vulcan stretched out one of his hands. *Closer, Jim. I will take the pain away.*

Then Kirk found he was moving, albeit slowly, across the green carpet of grass which separated them, until finally he lifted his hand and his fingers met those of the Vulcan. And with the touching came peace, and the image was gone.

"Spock!" Kirk jerked himself awake, and realised that he'd spoken the word aloud, although his throat was so parched and dry he doubted whether anyone would have heard him. Above his head, he could hear the steady bleep of the diagnostic indicators, and it took him a moment to understand he was in Sickbay. At the same instant he realised that his left hand was clenched tight in one of Spock's hands, and turning his head, he saw a very Human

Spock leaning back asleep in the chair next to the bed, his face white. Kirk pulled his hand gently away and tried to get up, but a firm touch pushed him back.

"Don't move, Jim." The Doctor's voice was reassuring, but with an undercurrent of worry in it. "You're very weak and must lie still."

Kirk realised now that he did indeed feel very ill, and because he couldn't remember a reason for his weakness, he felt afraid. "What's the matter, Bones? What happened?"

The Doctor tried to smile, but the Captain knew him too well to be deceived. "Jim, I'm not sure myself exactly what happened. Spock and I have surmised that your other half must have been wounded, and that somehow you too experienced the injury. If Spock hadn't pulled you through, I don't think I would have been able to save you."

"Spock? But this half of him doesn't have the power..."

McCoy broke in. "Not this half, and not the other. Somehow the two of them together must have sensed your need and responded." The Doctor smiled a little. "After all, they do it all the time in one body, so I suppose that they can do it as well in two. The trouble is - " and the Doctor hesitated - "we're not sure yet if your other half has survived." He paused a little to allow the implications to sink in. It seemed unnecessarily cruel to tell all this to the weakened Captain, but McCoy knew his friend would want to know all the facts.

"We're headed for Tyree's planet, and the Vulcan is heading towards us in the shuttlecraft, but we're not yet in communication range. If the other Kirk is alive, you're going to have to rejoin immediately, and you'll have to be awake and in control to do that. I daren't give you any more medication, so you'll have to hang on until then." His voice softened. "It shouldn't be for very long."

"I see." Kirk did indeed see, but already he could feel his hold on reality weakening, and doubted if he would stay conscious for that long. "And Spock?"

"Let him sleep. He's been overstretched by all this as well, and will need all his strength for the rejoining process."

Kirk nodded, then held the Doctor's eyes. "Bones, if the worst comes to the worst, you'll have to risk a mild stimulant. I need to get through this for Spock's sake as much as my own. You must promise."

Grudgingly, reluctantly, the Doctor nodded.

In the event, no stimulants were needed. The shuttlecraft radioed in barely fifteen minutes later, the Vulcan reporting in clipped tones that the other Kirk was stable, but in urgent need of medical attention.

"I suggest, Doctor, that you have a medical team standing by, and a stretcher ready."

McCoy shook the sleeping Spock awake, and together they helped Kirk to the transporter room. They had barely reached there before the Vulcan materialised, holding the other Kirk firmly in his arms. "Immediately, Doctor." The urgency in his voice was unseemly even for a Vulcan.

They sat Kirk down, for he was too weak to stand, and placed the unconscious Kirk in his arms.

Just like before, McCoy told himself. *It worked last time and it'll work now.* But a part of him still doubted, and he was afraid.

Kirk looked up and saw the expression on the Human Spock's face. "I'm sorry I wasn't of much help to you," and then he was gone in the shimmer of the transporter beam.

He materialised unconscious. Before McCoy could react, the Vulcan had picked Kirk up and carried him to the stretcher waiting outside. They hadn't allowed the medical staff into the transporter room, in case any of them should see two of each of their Superior Officers.

McCoy ran a scanner over Kirk and frowned at the results. "He's very weak. I must get him to Sickbay immediately." He hesitated, unsure what to do, but the Vulcan uncharacteristically laid a hand on his arm.

"Go with him, Doctor. His need is greater than mine. I will join you shortly", and McCoy nodded, accepting the logic of the situation.

The Human Spock was waiting inside the transporter room, already on one of the pads. Scott was at the controls. "You should stand together, Mr Spock, as the Captain did. It may not work otherwise."

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow. "Separate pads will be quite adequate, Mr Scott. I'm sure you know how to combine the beams."

He joined his Human half on the platform, and for a second something passed between them, as if each acknowledged they had a part to play in the greater whole. Then, "Energise, Mr Scott," and the engineer slowly pulled the levers.

The next day, McCoy was halfway through his third scotch when Spock joined him in the Sickbay office. Contrary to popular belief McCoy was not a heavy drinker, but there were some feelings for which a stiff drink was the only remedy, and anger was one of them.

They had taken it in turns to sit with Kirk through the long hours until they were sure he would be all right, and it was only now that they both felt able to leave him in the care of the Sickbay staff.

Spock stopped short inside the door as he saw the Doctor's face. "Doctor?" He raised an eyebrow in query.

"Read this, Spock." McCoy jabbed the button illuminating the viewscreen, calling up a recorded message. "It came in from Starfleet a short while ago."

Spock sat in the chair and obediently read the message.

"To Enterprise from Starfleet Command. Congratulations and well done on the success of both missions. Pleased there were no major mishaps. Please forward full reports as soon as possible. Commodore Matthews."

McCoy spoke in a whisper, scarcely able to contain his fury, the drink finally loosening

all the fear and worry he had felt over the last few days.

"No major mishaps! They almost killed him, Spock. If you hadn't been able to save him, I would have lost him. And for what? A Starfleet experiment with a man's life? He deserves better from them than that!" McCoy shuddered. "It really was touch and go for a while, Spock. There was a moment..."

"I know, Doctor. I felt it too." Spock's quiet words did more than any shouting to stop McCoy's tirade.

The Doctor put his head in his hands. "I'm sorry, Spock. I know it was worse for you than for me. But it really was that close, and I could do nothing..."

"Leonard." The very rare use of his first name jerked McCoy out of his self-recrimination. "Jim is not a fool. He knew the risks, as I did. Our mission is to explore new worlds, and figuratively speaking this was just another world to explore. Both he and I have learned a lot about ourselves, and how we inter-relate. It can only make us stronger. And your help and counselling have been invaluable to all four of us."

McCoy stared at the Vulcan, a lump in his throat at the unexpected confidence. He reached for the bottle, only to find that Spock beat him to it, and removed it.

"And now, Doctor, if you have finished poisoning your system with alcohol, I suggest you get some rest. I will sit with the Captain while you sleep."

McCoy rose gratefully to the bait. "Don't lecture me, you pointy-eared Vulcan. I'll decide when I've had enough to drink".

"Negative, Doctor. I do not consider you rational enough to make that decision." His voice unexpectedly softened. "Good night, Doctor." The door slid quietly shut behind him.

McCoy stared at the doorway for a long moment, then smiled in appreciation of Spock's cleverly manipulated change of mood. "Wha'd'you know," he muttered to himself. "Perhaps the whole really is greater than the sum of the parts." And sleepily, he yawned.

